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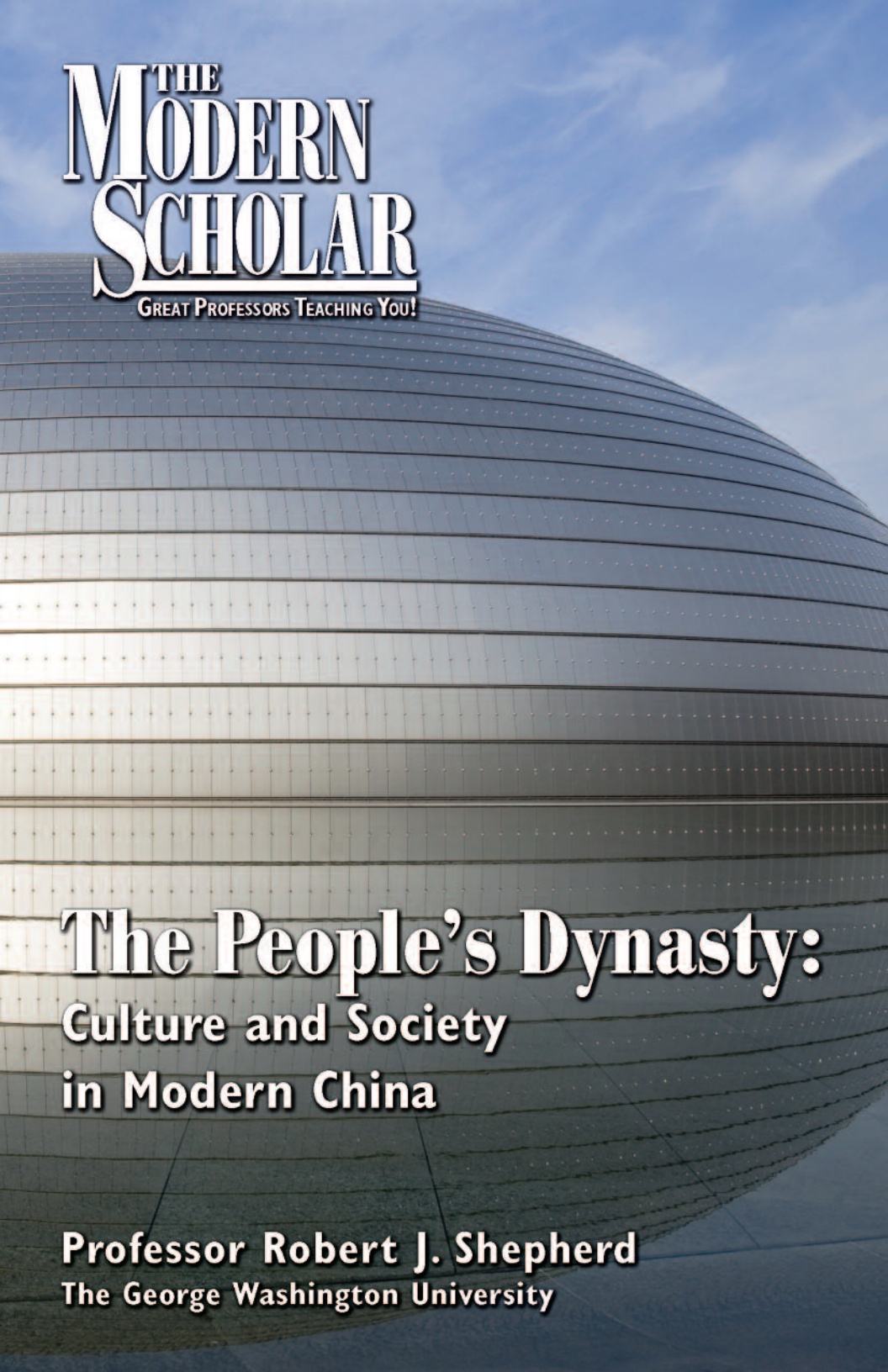

The People's Dynasty:
Culture and Society in Modern China

Professor Robert J. Shepherd
The George Washington University

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Cover image: The National Grand Theatre—also known as "The Egg"—in Beijing, China © Tito Wong

#UT164 ISBN: 978-1-4407-8279-4

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Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

About Your Professor

Robert J. Shepherd

Robert J. Shepherd is an assistant professor of anthropology and honors in the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University. He holds a B.A. in political science and history from the University of Delaware, an M.A. in history from Northeastern University, and a Ph.D. in cultural studies from George Mason University. He began to teach courses at the George Washington University in 2003. Before this, Dr. Shepherd spent two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in rural Nepal, three years teaching at a United Nations educational training institute in Beijing, China, and two years helping design and implement a national technical training program in Java, Indonesia. He has also led study-abroad programs to China and Tibet, and worked with the University of Virginia's "Semester at Sea" program.

Professor Shepherd's work on tourism, cultural heritage issues, and the side effects of market changes in China has appeared in *Southeast Asia Research*, *Consumption, Markets, and Culture*, the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, and the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, among other publications. His book *When Culture Goes to the Market: The Politics of Space, Place and Identity in an Urban Marketplace* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2008) encompasses an ethnographic study of Washington, DC's Eastern Market, a popular weekend produce and flea market, and the people who constitute it: vendors, market supervisors, and customers. His current research focuses on the privatization of public and communal space on Chinese university campuses, and the politics of cultural heritage programs. For the past two summers he has organized and led a study-abroad program in Beijing for the University Honors Program and the Department of Anthropology.

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Introduction

Since 1979, the state-directed opening of the Chinese economy has been a major topic of interest to American scholars, students, and the public at large. These reforms have radically transformed all aspects of economic life in China. Agricultural land has been leased to individual farmers, state companies have been either privatized or forced to compete for market share, foreign investment has been encouraged, and private enterprise has become the foundation of both production and consumption. These policies have been strongly supported and encouraged by a succession of administrations of both political parties in the United States. From Nixon and Carter to Clinton, Bush, and Obama, there has been a strong consensus that trade with and investment in China served the political interests of the United States, because a China dominated by market forces would inevitably become a more democratic society and state.

These predictions, at least in the short term, have not become a reality. Twenty years after the 1989 demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, the Chinese Communist Party continues to rule the People's Republic as a one-party state, and is arguably stronger now than at any time since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. Moreover, a cause-and-effect relationship between macro-level economic growth and demands for democracy is not, at least in the case of China, evident. Nevertheless, descriptions of events in China, whether political, cultural, social, or other, are often presented by American media outlets as "state versus society" issues. In this approach, "the state" is presented as a monolithic entity that thinks, speaks, and acts as one, while "society" is presumed to describe all private citizens, united in their opposition to "the state." Yet, not only do different interests drive different parts of the state in China, citizens are clearly not united in their view of either their government or the Chinese Communist Party. Instead, how people react to social issues, situations, and problems is at least in part tied to their own social, economic, and class positions.

This course takes as its subject Chinese society and two tentative assumptions. First is the reality of class differences within China. As in any society dominated by private market forces, some people have gained more through privatization than others. With class privileges comes power, perhaps not political, but power that manifests itself in other ways. The second assumption is that the absence of political change in China does not mean the absence of social and cultural change. The radical transformation of the Chinese economy has affected all aspects of citizens' lives, from how they marry, raise a family, choose a job, and find a place to live, to what, where, and how they consume. Over the course of these fourteen lectures, we will examine these changes.

Lecture 1

China Today

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Rob Gifford's *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power*, chapters 1–4.

zhongguo xianzai – "China today"

"China" evokes for many people a confusing set of images, ranging from the pomp and glitter of the 2008 Olympic games in Beijing to stories of political repression, hyper-modernization, mass consumption, and seemingly enormous environmental issues. Many Americans equate China with human rights problems, the political issue of Tibet, contaminated food products, and sweatshop labor. Indeed, like many foreign places, China tends to only appear in American popular media at times of natural disasters or social turmoil. Yet for all of the criticisms of China, it is difficult to ignore the remarkable success of economic reforms undertaken in the country over the past twenty years. During this time, the country's gross national product has risen thirteen times over, and per capita income has reached $3,140, while life expectancy has reached 73, almost double what it was in 1960. Despite the 2008 global recession, the Chinese economy still grew 9.6 percent in 2009 and shows no signs of faltering.

Of course, this does not mean that the country does not have serious development problems. The reforms that began in 1979 under Deng Xiaoping have created winners and losers. According to the United Nations, approximately 10 percent of Chinese citizens still live on less than one dollar a day, and 35 percent on less than two dollars per day. The public health-care system has largely collapsed, and the gradual privatization of state enterprises has led to large-scale unemployment in some regions, while the lack of work opportunities in rural areas has led to a massive movement of peasants to urban areas. The country has a growing illegal drug trade, a widening sex trafficking problem, and a government riddled with corruption. How does one make sense of this enormously complex and rapidly changing society, and how can it be done in a way that acknowledges the practical dilemmas the ruling Chinese Communist Party must grapple with?

This course provides an introduction to this challenge by discussing the scale and size of this amazingly diverse society that includes approximately one-quarter of all people on earth. Consideration is given to the realities of China today—not for what foreigners would wish it to be, but for what it is.

A useful place to start is June 4, 1989. On that date, units of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) rolled through the streets of Beijing and across Tiananmen Square, violently ending a month of popular protests against the status quo. Hundreds of citizens died, thousands were arrested, and thousands more fled into exile. For many experts and others in Europe and North

America, this violent action was the swan song of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). With the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, it appeared that the fall of the CCP would inevitably follow. Yet this did not happen. Instead, within a few years, rapid economic growth had returned and the Party remained in power. It is arguable that the CCP is actually more stable now than at any time since shortly after the 1949 establishment of the People's Republic. While it is increasingly difficult to meet Party members who voice any belief in Marxist-Leninism, membership in the Party is booming, especially among urban elites, those who have benefitted the most from economic reforms. This is in part because many of the demands made by Tiananmen Square protestors in 1989 have actually been met by the government. While news media in the United States at the time emphasized demands for democracy, protestors also demonstrated for more specific changes, ranging from guaranteed property rights and the ability to travel and live anywhere in the country to increased consumption and privacy. People wanted personal space, outside the gaze of the government and party.

To a remarkable extent, this is precisely what Chinese citizens now have. People can choose their jobs, quit when they want, live where they want, buy real estate, travel, date, divorce, shop—in short, enjoy all the aspects of personal freedom that money can buy—as long as they do not engage in politics. The catch of course is having the money to achieve these goals: as in every market society, freedom in the form of personal choice and agency is linked to wealth. In short, the social contract that links citizens and state in the PRC has been rewritten. After the 1949 Liberation, and especially at the height of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the Communist Party demanded total loyalty from citizens, in exchange for which people received employment, housing, health care, food rations, education, and a pension. In today's China, the Party allows citizens to make as much money and consume as much as they want, in exchange for political loyalty. While from an American perspective this might seem to be an unfair bargain, this needs to be thought about from the perspective of average Chinese citizens. After several generations of life being dominated by politics, a complete lack of individual space, and material deprivation, an absence of politics is not necessarily a bad thing.

Protesters crowd Tiananmen Square in May 1989, about a week before the June 4 crackdown by the Chinese government.

© Elliot Kallen

Nevertheless, many outside observers continue to believe that the growth of a market economy in China will eventually lead to a democratic society. American foreign policy toward China has been premised on this assumption since the Carter Presidency and transcends political party differences. This view that engagement with the Chinese Communist Party economically will eventually lead to a politically open society is based in part on the work of W.W. Rostow, the father of modernization theory. Writing in 1959, Rostow argued that all societies pass through five stages of development, moving from feudalism to capitalism until finally achieving a mass consumer society. Rostow cleverly took the grand historical narrative of Karl Marx and changed the ending: human development will not end with a communist utopia but with a world filled with the equivalent of the Mall of America. However, while Rostow was very ambiguous about such a historical outcome, those who have followed him, notably the prolific Tom Friedman, have made careers of lauding the revolutionary spirit of globalization. Yet if China is the best example of a closed society embracing a market economy that in turn is supposed to lead to democracy, the realities of China pose serious questions about this theory.

This is because the story of China today is not of a heroic class of ambitious entrepreneurs trying to pry the lid off a decrepit and totalitarian state, but instead of a growing entrepreneurial class closely tied to ruling elites and the Communist Party. Chinese businesspeople gain affluence and succeed in the market not by contesting state power, but by working with it, much like the way business works in places such as the United States. In addition, a growing privileged class of "winners" within China has little reason to challenge either the government or the Communist Party, because the system as it works now actually benefits them.

While easy to dismiss this as a contradiction, it is important to remember the historical context of current reforms. Beginning with the first Opium War (1839–1842), Chinese people experienced to varying degrees approximately one hundred fifty years of social disruption, political instability, and at times war. Some of the major incidents since that time are listed below.

- A second Opium War in 1856–1860 that forced the imperial government to not just provide foreigners trading rights but to also allow Christian missionaries to proselytize under the protection of the Chinese government.
- The Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), led by an obscure provincial scholar who claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ, and in which approximately 25 million people died.
- A widespread Muslim rebellion (1862–1877) in Southwest and Northwest China, in which 7 million died.
- A short war (1894–1895) with Japan that resulted in the loss of Korea, Taiwan, and eventually Manchuria.
- The 1900–1901 Boxer Rebellion and resulting foreign occupation of Beijing and burning of the Imperial Summer Palace.

- The Warlord Era (1916–1928), during which central authority collapsed.
- A second war with Japan (1937–1945).
- The civil war between nationalist and communist forces (1945–1949).
- Involvement in the Korean War (1950–1953).
- An anti-rightist campaign followed by a Maoist attempt to fast-forward economic change that led to mass famine (1957).
- The chaos and violence of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).
- A short border war with Vietnam (1979).
- The events of Tiananmen Square (1989).

Since 1989, the Chinese economy has expanded rapidly and social realities have radically changed for most citizens, in both positive and negative ways. The Communist Party officially follows a policy of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," which links an emerging private sector with state banks and institutions, emphasizes the production of consumer goods for both export and domestic use, and offers citizens limited social liberties. This system has also offered a stable currency, political stability, relatively low inflation, and in general a guarded sense of optimism for many citizens. Nevertheless, critics continue to argue that this system is unsustainable in the long term. What we can say is that there is no reason to assume that either the Chinese government or the Communist Party do not want citizens to benefit from social and economic reforms; what they reject is any threat to the one-party state. No longer particularly interested in communism, the Chinese Communist Party now emphasizes its role as a guide to modernization and its ability to provide social order and economic growth. In this sense the CCP's ideological basis is not Marxist-Leninism or communism, but rather national development, or what some observers term "Market Leninism"—not a new form of socialism, but authoritarianism with market characteristics.

A Chinese soldier stands guard at Tiananmen Square in 2009.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why might an absence of politics not necessarily be a bad thing for Chinese citizens?
2. Why might China not fall in line with the stages of modernization theory?

Suggested Reading

Gifford, Rob. *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power*. Reprint. New York: Random House, 2008.

Other Books of Interest

Dickson, Bruce J. Chapters 1–3. *Wealth into Power: The Communist Party's Embrace of China's Private Sector.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Websites of Interest

The University of Oregon hosts a website that serves as an online clearinghouse for websites about Chinese history and politics. — http://newton.uor.edu/Departments&Programs/AsianStudiesDept/china-history.html#sites

Lecture 2

New Forms of Mobility

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Michael Dutton's *Streetlife China*, part II, "The 'Strategies' of Government and 'Tactics' of Subaltern," chapters 1 and 2.

hukou – "household registration laws"

China's "Open Door" era began in 1979 when the late Deng Xiaoping, who rose to power soon after Chairman Mao's death in 1976, announced a series of national reforms. These initial policies, dubbed the "Four Modernizations," called for investments in science, technology, national defense, and agricultural production. What linked these goals was a need for a renewed educational sector. Much of the formal education system had been dismantled or had collapsed during the ten years of political and class violence unleashed by Chairman Mao in 1966. Many teachers at all levels had suffered or had been forcibly relocated to rural areas to "learn from peasants" by doing physical labor. Beginning in 1970, millions of high school and university students had also been "sent down to the countryside." After reforms began, many of these people sought to return to their urban homes. What prevented this, however, was the lack of not only social mobility in China, but physical mobility. Following the 1949 establishment of the People's Republic, the government had refined and strengthened already-existing state control policies, so that by 1979 every aspect of a citizen's life was linked to state institutions. In this lecture, I will discuss how this system worked in the past and how it has gradually been eroded by economic and social demands in contemporary society, without fully disappearing.

© China News Agency

Deng Xiaoping in 1979

Restrictions on the movement of people have existed in various forms in China since at least the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). These controls reflect a cultural mistrust of the notion of "disorder" (*luan*), which is reflected in a common description of migrants as "randomly flowing people" (*mangliu*), or people "out of place." Such a perspective is understandable in a society that until quite recently was largely rural and agricultural, and composed of countless small villages made up of people related in some way to each other. This is also reflected in a Confucian emphasis on family ties, illustrated in a famous passage from the Confucian scholar Mencius, who advised people to bar their doors and ignore conflicts between strangers. To be a

"floating" person in traditional China was to be a person without a home and family (the foundations of a Confucian world view) and thus to live outside of social norms and boundaries.

In the People's Republic, household registration laws (*hukou*) were established in urban areas in 1951 and in the countryside in 1955. These laws, which fixed a person's residency by birth, functioned much like an internal passport. Under the *hukou* system, any form of travel, whether for work, education, or personal reasons, required permission from officials. Citizens were classified by birthplace (inherited from one's mother) as well as by socioeconomic status. So, for example, someone born in Beijing to a mother who held no legal residency rights in Beijing would not be classified as a Beijing resident. Similarly, someone born to a peasant couple in a rural village would be officially classified as an agricultural worker of that village. People in theory could change their residency status, but this was very difficult and tended to favor urban residents. For example, a person could be promoted at their job and transferred to a new location, while students who passed national examinations could gain admission to universities and colleges in other places. In practice, personal connections played a key role in residency status, as well as the built-in advantages the system provided to urban citizens. Indeed, the entire control system clearly privileged urban residents, especially those with official residency in a desirable city such as Beijing or Shanghai. Not only would these people have access to better educational and work opportunities, they would also usually have access to better food and consumer goods. Those who did not gain from this system were the vast majority of the population, the roughly 85 percent of people classified as rural residents. It was difficult, if not impossible, to escape from the countryside once classified as a rural resident. The net result was the replacement of a starkly unequal class society in pre-1949 China with a new type of class system, consisting of urban residents and rural peasants.

The system worked well as long as the government controlled all aspects of life, especially in cities and towns. All employment was with state institutions, organized as "work units" (*danwei*). A work unit provided not just a job, but also housing, health care, recreation, and food. In the countryside, communes took on these responsibilities, except housing, which peasants had to provide themselves. People were born into, married into, and died in work units; these were in many ways not just the state-in-practice, but also the foundational social space for members. Personal identity for most urban residents was based largely in their work units.

© Yi-Cheng Wu

A farm worker walks with a cow while carrying a hand scythe along a rural road near Lanzhou, in Gansu Province.

As disconcerting as such a system might seem for Americans, it is tricky to classify these work units as either emblematic of an all-powerful state or as logical sites of resistance to state power. We should be careful to assume that a social order based on collective institutions would automatically *not* be attractive to individuals, given that this binds them not just economically, but also socially to employers. This assumes that all people accept the idea that workers in a market economy are freer because employers can only fire them from their jobs, not penalize their access to housing, education, food, and other necessities. However, these assumptions only hold true if work-unit administrators actually were able to utilize this power. The problem was that all people were linked to specific work units, and transfer between these was difficult for any reason. So, although workers lacked freedom of movement between workplaces, they were also protected to some extent against involuntary transfers. It is more important to understand how socialism in Maoist China worked: this was a system based on work-unit life, and thus was radically different than the centrally organized structure of society in the Soviet Union.

This system could remain stable as long as citizens relied on the state for all aspects of security. But once the government began to emphasize industrial development, a practical problem arose: an increasingly industrialized economy required more and more workers, not just in heavy industrial factories, but in a range of sectors, including construction, textiles, and services. In addition, because domestic and foreign investment was initially concentrated along China's east coast and in urban areas, workers were needed in specific places. At the same time, agricultural reforms had abolished communes, given peasants individual land-use rights, and emphasized increased efficiency. The net result was a large and growing class of rural residents not needed on farms and unable to find alternative employment in the countryside. This class of "mobile laborers," referred to in China as the "floating population," is estimated to be as high as 150 million people.

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Formerly a carpenter in a rural community, this man was recruited by a town official to work in Beijing during the construction of the National Aquatics Center for the 2008 Olympics.

Quite simply, the government can no longer control the movement of people within China and indeed recognizes that these peasants now serve a key economic purpose. However, the residency system has not been abolished, in part because state authorities at the municipal level must address urban residents' concerns about "outsiders." Much like in the debate about illegal immigration in the United States, undocumented workers in urban China are popularly blamed for a variety of social problems ranging from crime, drugs, and prostitution to the high cost of private housing, though with little or no evidence. The fact is that these workers either do the dirty jobs legal residents no longer want to do or provide new forms of services to privileged urban residents, such as maids and nannies.

The national government has tried various strategies to regain control of population movement. In 1985, a "Temporary Certificate" program was announced. This provided undocumented workers with temporary legal residency if they registered with local authorities and paid a fee. This program largely failed because it offered no tangible benefits to settled "illegal" urban residents, but potentially did the opposite by requiring them to identify themselves to authorities. In the early 1990s, some municipal governments began to sell residency cards, which led central authorities to announce a "Blue Stamp" program that effectively legalized this practice. This program benefits those with the wealth to "buy" legal status and has turned the *hukou* system, originally designed to foster a communist society, into a market commodity. Prices for residency vary based on the town or city, with residency in places such as Shanghai costing thousands of dollars.

The central government maintains control of its citizens in the wake of ongoing socioeconomic change in the market: money talks. As in most areas of life in China, the ability to live and work where one pleases is closely linked to one's class status. Although this in a certain sense is how the system worked in the past, what is different today is the ability of people of any standing, whether peasant, worker, or intellectual, to accumulate wealth and thus social standing. Money can, it seems, buy most anything.

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Children of migrant workers attend a school set up by city officials to help attract rural workers who have relocated to help with construction projects that have transformed urban China.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was the net result of agricultural reforms?
2. What is the "Blue Stamp" program?

Suggested Reading

Dutton, Michael. *Streetlife China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Other Books of Interest

Tyson, James, and Ann Tyson. Chapter 13. "The Moon Reflecting the Sunlight: Village Women in China." *China Off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*. Eds. Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

Articles of Interest

Chan, Kam Wing, and Li Zhang. "The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China." Cambridge: *China Quarterly*, vol. 160, pp. 818–856, December 1999.

Websites of Interest

1. The *Asia Times* provides an article from April 2007 entitled "How the Hukou System Distorts Reality" by China editor Wu Zhong. — http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/ID11Ad01.html
2. The Congressional-Executive Commission on China provides a summary and witness testimony from a September 2005 roundtable meeting entitled "China's Household Registration (Hukou) System: Discrimination and Reform." — http://www.cecc.gov/pages/roundtables/090205/index.php

Lecture 3

The New Class Society

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Ching Kwan Lee's *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women*, chapters 1–3, and *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, chapters 3 and 4.

xiahai – "jump into the sea"

From a macro-level economic view, new opportunities for people to move about the country have led to new work opportunities for millions of Chinese citizens. From this perspective, the right to not work for the government and instead to have the freedom to choose a job has benefitted a great many people while providing a more efficient labor force for China's rapidly growing economy. Yet these newfound freedoms appear to be much more ambiguous from the perspectives of some citizens. If it is mistaken to assume that not all people would find life in a work unit as necessarily negative, it follows that not all people will find these new work realities to be unreservedly positive. The right to work for whom and where one pleases might not be seen as a "right" by all people in what after all is supposed to be a socialist society. In like manner, what from an American perspective might seem like a lack of freedom to change jobs or choose where to live (the realities of Chinese state work units) can also be seen as a guaranteed right to a job or an apartment (the view of some disaffected Chinese workers). The wholesale transformation of work and housing into market commodities has not then been a triumphant process welcomed by all in China, reflected in the Chinese phrase used to describe the search for work in a post-work-unit society, "jumping into the sea." This metaphor is quite different than the American phrase, "the free market." To "jump into the sea" implies a clear and present danger and is not necessarily a choice. Some drown, many survive by treading water, and a few reach shore and achieve the riches and power our notion of the "free market" carries.

As noted in the last lecture, millions of migrants fill the jobs that legal urban residents no longer want to do. They clean rooms, work as nannies, sweep streets, hawk food and other items on the streets, wash dishes, and clerk in mini-markets. While peasant women and young girls fill the export factories of Southern and Eastern China, peasant men work as security guards and construction workers throughout the country. This new class of mobile laborers are both feared and condemned by urban Chinese. Both popular media and the "man on the street" blame them for everything from increased petty crime and other social problems to littering and crowded public transportation. This mixture of fantasy, facts, and fears becomes a generalized "common sense": migrants are a social problem.

Outside of China, many critics focus on the working conditions of Chinese factories, arguing that these are tantamount to sweatshops. Hours are long, often seventy per week, days off are few, and pay is miniscule, in some cases as little as 100 dollars per month. Others argue that these jobs, as little as they pay, provide work for people (mainly rural women) who would otherwise suffer. The reality is clearly more complex.

First of all, factory work in China, especially in the consumer goods industry, is highly gendered: the vast majority of assembly-line jobs are filled by women. Before thinking about why this is so, it is important to be clear about what we mean by "gender." This is not a biological category. Nor is this something that only women have. Finally, "gender" by itself cannot explain social problems and realities; other factors such as ethnicity, race, religion, education, and socio-economic class must also be considered. In the case of Chinese factory work, many of these jobs are not filled by women in general, but a specific type of woman—young peasant women with little education who live far from home, usually in dormitories connected to their company.

Second, working conditions in factories vary widely, depending on the industry, the location, and the management. Among most workers, a clear hierarchy exists in terms of which type of management is good to work for. Domestic Chinese companies are usually deemed the worst and most exploitive, followed by South Korean and Hong Kong companies, Taiwanese investors, and Japanese. The most desirable jobs are usually those with European or American joint-partnerships. However, many large American companies do not actually invest in factory production in China, but instead contract with other producers for goods. Thus, for example, companies such as Nike, Walmart, and Target do not employ any factory workers themselves. Because they are "customers" (albeit very large and therefore influential) they can argue that they are not responsible for pay or working conditions of their suppliers.

Research shows that peasant women who take these jobs surrender most of their personal autonomy to their supervisors. Factory dormitories create a captive work

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Chinese Factory 1

Top: Workers—mostly women—stand in a line kept orderly by a security guard at the beginning of a work day in a toy factory.

Below: An American cartoon icon is meticulously hand painted by workers at the factory.

force, made even harsher by the fact that national identity cards are often held by management and pay is often provided only monthly. Because most of these workers do not have any legal standing in the communities in which factories are located, they have little means of resistance. Yet why then do so many women take these jobs, traveling far from home to work hard, make little, and live with strangers?

A lack of information is not the reason. Cell phones are widely used in China and are so cheap that many people, including villagers, can afford them. Chinese print and electronic media also cover factory issues such as worker abuse. In addition, many women are recruited for factory work through kin and friend networks. Thus, we can assume that most of these women know the conditions of these jobs beforehand (although knowing and experiencing are not the same).

If not a knowledge issue, then is this because life at home is desperate? Little evidence for this hypothesis exists. There is no famine in China, and by all accounts rural life is better now than at any time since the Cultural Revolution. But because life in the countryside may not be desperate does not mean that people are thriving. While few starve, many lack choices. As in many developing countries, young people in the countryside see traveling far away to find work a temporary measure, a means of saving money to build a house, get married, buy desired consumer goods like televisions, refrigerators, and motorbikes.

For young women, this can also serve as a way of changing their family status. Because girls traditionally marry "out," they have historically been viewed as a burden. However, many peasant women now send money back to their families at home. In addition, by staying "away," they can avoid family choices they might disagree with (such as an arranged marriage) not by openly rebelling, but simply by not going home.

The effect of this mass movement of rural people to urban areas is not just evident in cities. Agricultural work has been increasingly feminized, given that in many rural communities young people are largely

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Chinese Factory 11

Top: Workers at a doll factory file by servers during a meal break.

Below: Two female workers sleep on bags of filling used to stuff dolls during an afternoon break. The worker on the right holds a doll.

going away to seek work, along with male heads of households. The net result is households consisting of elderly retirees, young children, and married women. For these women, reforms have "freed" them to take on added responsibilities with little material gain. By some accounts rural China now has one of the highest suicide rates in the world among women. Is this simply better reporting, or are suicide rates rising? We should remember that after 1949 women in rural China gained marriage rights, while the Communist Party abolished bride selling, prostitution, foot binding, and the practice of concubines. Market reforms have seen the reemergence of all of these practices except foot binding.

Finally, while regulations prescribing minimum pay, working hours, and living conditions do exist, enforcing these regulations is a problem. It is increasingly evident that central and in some cases provincial authorities are attempting to better enforce worker rights, but these attempts are resisted at local levels, in part because of local government concerns about losing investors and thus jobs and tax revenue, and in part because of corruption.

If economic reforms have created a new class of mobile peasant workers who are simultaneously exploited and liberated, these same reforms have destroyed the lives of millions of former state workers, particularly in China's rust belt, the northeast, which at one time was known as Manchuria. After the first Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese government gained control of not just Korea and Taiwan, but also Manchuria. It established a puppet regime it called

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Chinese Factory III

This fiber-optic systems assembly and testing factory with primarily European multinational customers provides a clean and low-stress working environment, including soothing music playing in the background.

"Manchuko," installed the last Qing emperor as a figurehead ruler, and invested heavily in industrializing the region. After the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, Manchuko was returned to China. By the 1950s it was the industrial center of the country, producing steel, iron ore, heavy industrial equipment, cars and trucks, and munitions. However, following the opening of the national economy to foreign investment, funding flowed south and east, re-creating the historic economic trade patterns of China. After the government decided to start the process of making work units accountable to market forces, large conglomerates were particularly hard hit. Many simply could not compete with private companies that did not have to pay for worker housing, pensions, and other social benefits. The net result is a new class of either underemployed or permanently unemployed state workers in areas such as the northeast. These workers have not embraced the freedoms of market forces. They instead argue bitterly and at times demonstrate publicly for what they believe are the rights they have lost. In their minds, the destruction of the "iron rice bowl" that formerly guaranteed employment, housing, pensions, and security is a betrayal by the Communist Party of its core principles.

Work units are designed to mold identification with the unit, not the (Confucian) family or the (Marxist) working class. This structure both enables micro-protests (since people within a unit are closely connected) and inhibits macro-level ones (since there has been little horizontal movement between work units).

A cynical view of the threat to social order posed by disgruntled former state workers is this: most of these people are elderly, and will soon be gone. Meanwhile, their children and grandchildren are growing up in a new China, one in which the government guarantees nothing beyond stability. Nevertheless, it is ironic that at times the most vocal critics of current economic policies are not the urban educated youth of romantic stereotypes but aging working-class factory hands.

Then, of course, there are those who have benefited greatly from reforms, the new professional classes of urban educated professionals. These are the people who have the education and residency status needed to fill a range of new occupations with domestic, joint-venture, and international companies. The most successful live in one of China's booming cities, are multilingual, and have the disposable income needed to enjoy life in the new China. They also paradoxically tend to be some of the most vocally nationalistic people in China, a striking fact when compared to what sociologists and political scientists usually assume about stakeholders. Indeed, many of these market winners are simultaneously cosmopolitan (at home in a global world of travel and consumption) and nationalistic. This is a phenomenon I will return to in the final lecture.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the "type of woman" who fills Chinese factory jobs?
2. What effects did the destruction of the "iron rice bowl" have on workers?

Suggested Reading

Lee, Ching Kwan. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

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Other Books of Interest

Chang, Leslie T. *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*. Reprint. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009.

Ngai, Pun. *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Websites of Interest

1. The *China Labor Watch* website compiles news and reports about labor conditions in Chinese factories. — http://www.chinalaborwatch.org
2. The *US-China Labor/Scholars' Exchange* website is jointly sponsored by the Labor Center at the University of California-Los Angeles, the JSM Institute Worker Education and Labor Studies of City University of New York, and the School of Human Resources at Remin University in Beijing to provide research and information on union activities and worker issues in China. — http://uschinalabor.org

Lecture 4

A Home of One's Own

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar* edited by Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong, introduction and chapters 1 and 2.

fangzi – "home" or "house"

Anyone who has visited a major Chinese city such as Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou has experienced the hyper-modernization of these places, particularly in terms of the visual: a seemingly unending construction project, a sea of giant cranes, and blocks after blocks of towering office towers, hotels, and apartment blocks are rapidly erasing the former Stalinist architecture of the Maoist era. Beijing no longer resembles Pyongyang, capital of North Korea, with its massive public buildings and monuments. Everything, it seems, is big—six-, eight-, ten-lane city roads, sidewalks that are designed for ten people or more across, shopping malls that are two or even three city blocks in size. Beijing has six beltways, six subway lines with five more soon to open, and so many concentrations of large-scale real estate that it is difficult to discern a downtown any longer. While global cities such as Shanghai and Beijing have quickly come to look like Hong Kong and Tokyo, this massive urban redevelopment is not limited to these places. In even remote areas of China, urban cityscapes are being transformed by commercial and infrastructure projects, from Lhasa in Tibet to Hohhot in Inner Mongolia. How has this reworking of urban space affected the lives of citizens, particularly in terms of housing?

A view of the skyline and city square in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia.

Inset: Five-story apartment houses along Genghis Khan Drive in Hohhot.

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Until quite recently, there were almost no privately owned residences in urban China. After the 1949 establishment of the PRC, all land was nationalized. Within urban areas, most housing became state-owned and production was organized around state enterprises. Yet by 2009, 81 percent of urban citizens owned their own homes, primarily apartments. This is a higher percentage of home ownership than in the United States. How have these rapid changes come about?

Following the start of the reform movement in 1979, state planners and reformers grappling with housing issues faced several problems. First, almost all urban residents lived in state-owned housing linked to their place of employment. These *danwei* (work units) operated as separate social and economic spheres, providing members with food, clothing, housing, education, and employment. As already noted, a person's work unit served as a key part of personal identity, because this influenced all aspects of life. The Communist Party sought to replace the foundational role family ties had played in Chinese society for thousands of years with a new form of community, a fully rationalized and organized planned micro-society that could break preferential kin ties and help shape people into modern socialist citizens. In other words, these policies aimed at turning the private sphere (Chinese *si*, literally "secret" or "illicit," historically located within the family) into a matter of work-unit social life, which itself stood in contrast to an abstract general public, the nation.

These policies succeeded as long as state institutions controlled all aspects of daily life. After all, if any of us did not just work at our job places, but also lived, shopped, entertained, and spent most of our time at these places, we would probably come to identify with these as home. But once economic reforms began, the privatization of work-unit space, including housing, necessarily had to follow.

This project had two goals, to privatize existing housing and to expand the supply of available housing. Focusing on increasing the housing supply first, planners instituted an experimental program in Xian and Nanjing in 1979 to construct and sell new housing at cost. This policy failed for the simple reason that few people could afford to purchase a new apartment, because wages and savings were on average quite low. A subsidized program was next tried in Zhejiang and Hubei Provinces from 1981 to 1982. This proved so successful that it was expanded to over three hundred cities in 1986. Under this program, new housing stock was jointly funded by the central government, work units, and individual occupants, with each contributing one-third of the construction cost. Citizens in effect became partners with

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Apartments built in the early 1980s in an older section of Wuhan City in Hubei Province.

their work units and the central government. This joint funding program enabled residents shut out of subsidized housing to gain access to a different sort of subsidized housing, in which they held limited use-rights, in exchange for a third of the cost of this housing. From an administrative perspective, new apartment blocks could be built quite cheaply, since two-thirds of the initial construction costs were subsidized by individuals and the state. From the central government perspective, more urban residents gained housing while the state role in supplying this was significantly reduced.

More complicated was how to privatize existing work-unit housing, most of which was located within state-owned enterprises (SOE). Beginning in the early 1990s, these state enterprises transferred use rights of apartments to their occupants at fixed prices. However, these use rights did not carry full property rights; instead, purchasers shared ownership with their work units. These initial policies failed to attract many buyers, for a range of reasons. First, few people had large enough savings or high enough wages to make down payments. In addition, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and ideological attacks on people who were labeled "capitalists" because their family owned property before 1949, convincing people that state and party officials actually supported private housing was not easy. Finally, for people with access to subsidized state housing, there was little incentive to purchase the right to use an apartment at a higher price than what they paid to rent this same apartment. For example, rents could be as low as twenty *yuan* per month (four dollars). For people who paid this little to use an apartment for life, why would they spend their life savings on a down payment and then take on a monthly mortgage to essentially continue to use the same apartment? Indeed, for many people, these policies were seen as an attempt to force them to pay for what they had already earned as a right—access to cheap public housing.

In response, the State Council, China's highest governing body, issued a directive in 1994 legalizing three forms of private housing. Apartments purchased at market price carried full ownership rights and could be bought and sold like any other commodity; units purchased at cost price carried a five-year rent/resale restriction; and subsidized units only provided occupancy (use) rights. Finally, in 1998, all state-affiliated enterprises and institutes were prohibited from constructing any further housing, which turned the urban housing sector into a completely market-driven industry.

The net effects of these regulations have been varied. While almost all housing previously owned by work units has been sold off to private citizens, how this was done copied how housing had been previously allocated. Typically, work-unit members gain the right to buy an apartment based on their seniority and other factors. While this recognized previous service, it penalized young and new work-unit members. With the ban on housing construction by state enterprises, these people have no choice but to find housing in the private sector, a "right" that is increasingly untenable for many, especially in major cities, where housing prices have exploded. In addition, different types of state

enterprises have fared differently under privatization. As noted above, those involved in manufacturing have suffered greatly. These units, especially in heavy industry, have often gone bankrupt, in the process displacing their workers and destroying entire communities. In these situations, a chance to buy an apartment is a mixed opportunity at best, providing shelter, but typically in an area with little resale value and bleak employment prospects. But other types of state enterprises have thrived.

One of the best examples of this is state educational institutions. Through the strategic marketing of language teaching (Chinese to foreign students and English to local students) and enclosed campuses as a new form of a gated community, higher educational institutions in desirable urban areas have done quite well. Apartment prices have risen sharply, enabling some lucky residents to use these as collateral to buy additional apartments in the private economy. At the same time, however, the privatization of living space in such work units and the introduction of non-unit residents have undermined a sense of community and collective identity. This sentiment is typically voiced by older residents. Instead of viewing market reforms as a process that has "freed" them from the ties of their work unit, they view the transformation of social relationships as a process that has altered lives in *their* community.

Finally, and rather paradoxically, private housing projects have replicated the *danwei* in its spatial form. Most urban areas are increasingly filled with planned communities that, like work units, offer a guarded walled or gated environment. These complexes offer residents protection from the side effects of the same market forces that have enabled them to purchase this housing—not "crime" or "deviance" per se, but the anonymity of "the market," manifested in the erasure of community ties that anchored both "traditional" society (in family and clan) and Maoist-revolutionary society (in work units).

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Left: The entrance to the popular Chunxi shopping district in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. Right: Two images of a "premium" two-bedroom apartment located near Chunxi being advertised for a monthly rent of about $526 on a one-year lease. The apartment "includes many electric devices" such as a color TV, a DVD player, a refrigerator, and an Internet connection.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why is the percentage of home ownership higher in China than in the United States?
2. Why was it difficult to convince people that state and party officials actually supported public housing?

Suggested Reading

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Websites of Interest

1. The *China Hush: Stories of China* website provides an extensive article from December 2009 entitled "Chinese Farmers Are 'Growing Houses' Instead of Growing Food." — http://www.chinahush.com
2. An article from March 2010 by AFP News entitled "China to Rein In Soaring Property Prices." — http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific_business/view/1041686/1/.html

Lecture 5

Changing Family Life

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Liu Dalin, Man Lun Ng, Zhou Pingli, and Erwin Haeberle's "Sexual Behavior in Modern China," chapter 11, in *China Off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*, edited by Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen.

jia – "family"

After 1949, the Communist Party set out to construct a society populated by citizens who looked to the Party and state and not to the family for their identity, in many ways replicating policies instituted in the early years of the former Soviet Union to create a trans-ethnic Soviet identity. Communism thus entered into a foundational debate in Chinese philosophy: should a person cultivate preferential ties with some people, or should a person seek to engage with all others on an equitable basis? Confucian scholars such as Mencius (372–289 BCE) argued that preferential bonds are natural. In their view, humans grow up within families, and thus have personal ties with specific family members, that transcend fictive ties to a general public, community, or nation. They argued these foundational ties took form in what Mencius called the "five bonds": father and child, sibling and sibling, spouse and spouse, friend and friend, and ruler and subject. Only one of these bonds, between friends, is equitable. Furthermore, only one of these bonds, that between ruler and subject, describes a nonpersonal relationship. From a Confucian perspective, all people have natural preferences for close kin, most relationships are unequal, and abstract social ties such as links between unrelated citizens or among strangers are not necessarily important. However, these five core human relationships are also linked through reciprocity. Just as a parent holds power over a child, he or she also has obligations to this child. In addition, a Confucian world view recognizes that an individual's set of relationships expand through life. Thus a child learns to be a good child through modeling the behavior of her parents, and in turn learns how to be a parent, friend, sibling, spouse, and subject through observing and modeling others.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

Mother and children in Beijing.

This was of course far from a perfect system. Just as any social theory can come to look very different when put into practice, Confucianism as practiced over the centuries came to be associated with a range of social problems. Thus, from a Chinese Communist Party perspective, the China of 1949 was not a young republic moving into the modern world, but a largely rural and illiterate feudal society riddled with poverty, superstition, and the gross mistreatment of women. Consequently, in addition to a property revolution, the CCP carried out a social revolution, abolishing bride-selling, prostitution, public gambling, and foot-binding. The new government began a mass education campaign and would later bring basic health care to areas where modern medicine was unknown. The government encouraged education for women and increased the role of women in the economy. During the Cultural Revolution gender equity was taken to the logical extreme in terms of unisex clothing, hair styles, and other gender markers.

© Matthew Rawley/shutterstock.com

Two brothers from northern Hebei Province whose wives left to work in the city and never returned.

It was during this period that Mao Zedong (1893–1976), Chairman of the Party, encouraged people to have large families as part of a national defense strategy. Mao was convinced that the United States, the Soviet Union, or both superpowers would eventually attack China. A large population, he reasoned, would ensure the country's survival. In the early 1950s, the success of Party social programs, increased food production, and a stable society led to a sharp rise in births, leading some demographers to warn of a looming crisis. Mao, however, ignored these warnings. By 1979, it was clear that population growth could potentially derail reform efforts. Consequently, the government implemented a policy that limited Han Chinese couples to one child.

This policy has, from a state and planning view, been very successful. The national birth rate in China has decreased from over three births per female to 1.6, which is actually below the natural rate of 2.1. A recent article in *Time* magazine estimated this decrease has resulted in 250 million fewer births, further aiding social and economic gains. However, this policy has attracted harsh criticism, especially from foreigners, who argue that government control over family planning is a clear human rights violation. Many groups allege forced abortions, sterilizations, and female infanticide.

Like the issue of labor conditions in Chinese factories, the realities of this policy are complex. The policy is clearly not the unmitigated success that state

officials assert. Indeed, as many people in China recognize, this policy has had a range of unforeseen consequences that in many cases pose important threats to social order. On the other hand, the extreme charges by critics of government-sanctioned infanticide are also questionable. First of all, why would a government deliberately seek to create a gender imbalance? Currently the country has 119 male births for every 100 female births. This means that there are approximately 32 million more men under the age of twenty than women. Add to this the fact that more rural women marry "up" into an urban area than do rural men, and it is quite clear that a significant number of young Chinese rural men will never be able to marry and have families. In addition to the impact this is having on a Confucian-based family structure that demands that men reproduce so as to continue the family name, it also raises significant security concerns. No government would seek to create a class of young men with no hope of a stable future. This has also led to a resurgence of kidnapping, sexual trafficking, and bride-selling, in addition to an enormous sex industry.

Why is there such a shortage of women, especially in rural areas? The Communist Party is less to blame than the Confucian emphasis on producing a son, since family lineage in China is passed on through males and sons are expected to care for their parents in old age. This desire to have a son has led to numerous cases in rural China of selective infanticide that is not directly forced by government officials, but chosen by parents. Several years ago the central government sought to restrict the use of sonogram machines for this very reason: people used these to determine the sex of their baby and then aborted females.

The policy has also not been applied uniformly. First of all, it has only been applied to the majority Han population. Officially recognized minority groups are allowed two children. In addition, because of the nature of village life, local officials might often be related to certain villagers. Finally, because peasants have received so little to begin with from the state, there are not many inducements state officials can use in the countryside. In urban areas, the policy has been far easier to enforce. Until recently, all urban residences lived and worked for the state and were easily tracked. People who violated the policy could be punished through public shaming, peer pressure, and ultimately the withholding of benefits such as access to education and health care, and ultimately a job.

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Four boys and a girl take a break at the village swimming hole in Zengchong, Guizhou Province.

Market reforms have impacted family life in multiple ways, providing people with more choices in some ways and fewer in other ways. Since most people in urban areas no longer have government jobs or depend on the government for health care, education, or a pension, the state has few ways to control how people behave. Instead, one's market standing shapes agency. For example, a well-off couple with the means to buy a large apartment can have more than one child now, simply because various state penalties do not affect them. They most likely do not care if they cannot use a state hospital, or send their child to a state school, or secure a state job. A working-class couple probably still cares, not necessarily because of state penalties, but because they probably cannot afford to have more than one child. Social and economic class standing has replaced political ideology as the key factor in determining family size.

China today is grappling with a range of new family issues. As noted above, family planning policies have in a sense been too successful, dropping the birth rate below the natural replacement rate. This has also transformed family relationships. Young children benefit from what demographers call the "4-2-1" structure of Chinese families (four grandparents, two parents, and one child). This provides children with six doting caregivers, leading some to label these privileged children "little emperors and empresses." But as the population ages, this structure will reverse, leaving fewer and fewer working people to care for and support a growing elderly population. Another seldom-remarked-upon phenomena is the erasure of close kin ties. For example, significant numbers of Chinese grow up without brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, or uncles, leading to new forms of "fictive" kin ties. Finally, and perhaps most important, is the significant gender imbalance among men and women.

Because of these emerging problems, some municipalities have begun encouraging certain classes of people (usually the rich and well educated) to have more than one child. However, this has not been an unqualified success, ironically because many of these people view a single-child family as the norm—which for them it is, having been how they have grown up.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

A young girl enjoying the day at Beihai Lake in Beijing.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did Mao Zedong encourage people to have large families?
2. What are the key factors in determining family size?

Suggested Reading

Liu, Dalin, Man Lun Ng, Li Ping Zhou, and Erwin J. Haeberle. Chapter 11. "Sexual Behavior in Modern China." *China Off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*. Eds. Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

Other Books of Interest

Farrer, James. Chapters 1–4. *Opening Up: Youth Sex Culture and Market Reform in Shanghai*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Pickowicz, Paul G., and Wang Liping. "Village Voices, Urban Activists: Women, Violence, and Gender Inequality in Rural China." *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*. Eds. Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

Websites of Interest

1. The *Time* magazine website provides an article from July 27, 2009, entitled "A Brief History of China's One-Child Policy" by Laura Fitzpatrick. — http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1912861,00.html
2. The *BBC News* website provides an article from February 2007 entitled "Wifeless Future for China's Men" by James Reynolds. — http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6346931.stm

Lecture 6

Religion and Society

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Rob Gifford's *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power*, chapters 13–20.

jiao – "religion"

Many people associate religion in China with Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. While these three belief systems have long been a part of Chinese culture and society, the country also has substantial numbers of Christians and Muslims. The degree to which people are free to practice their faith is highly controversial and needs to be placed into context. To the question of whether people in China have complete religious freedom, the answer is no. But compared to the state of religion in the country a generation ago, it is clear that faith is much more widespread among people and tolerated by the government and Party. Under Chinese law, citizens have both the right to believe in a religious faith and the right to not have a belief. A 1982 State Council decree under former chairman Hu Yaobang affirmed the right to practice, not just believe, for all citizens other than Communist Party members. This two-sided provision is very important because it implies that while people can have and practice a faith, there is no guaranteed right to proselytize. It also does not provide a right to practice a faith in any way a person wishes. As we will see, this has important implications for what the state defines as "official" religious organizations. But before discussing this, it is useful to briefly introduce major faith groups.

Statue of Confucius at the Confucian Temple in Beijing.

© Claudio Zaccherini/shutterstock.com

Confucius (551–479 BCE) lived in the state of Lu in today's Shandong Province along China's east coast. Like his contemporary Socrates in Athens, he was never overly influential or well off in life. He made a living as a teacher and spent more than a decade wandering the region with several followers, looking for an able and ethical prince to serve. His most important work, *The Analects*, was compiled long after his death. It is a collection of sayings and short dialogues, and would eventually become one

of the four foundational books of Confucianism during the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE). The other books are *The Doctrine of the Mean* (authored by Zisi, a grandson of Confucius), *The Great Learning* (a commentary on Confucius's writings compiled by a follower), and *The Mencius* (authored by the Confucian scholar of this name).

Confucianism is more a philosophy than a religion, although Confucian temples are found throughout China. In a Confucian world view, an ambiguous "God" (*shangdi*), which literally translates as "above the Emperor" (*huangdi*), exists. However, this concept of God is also carried in the word *tian* (heaven), which stands as an otherworldly counterpart to an earthly king (*wang*). Order is of central concern, both on earth and in heaven. This is achieved through proper ethical behavior, which requires constant reflective effort and proper maintenance of rituals. These rituals in turn are based on the rituals of the Western Zhou Dynasty (1064–771 BCE), which according to Confucius had achieved a state of harmonious perfection, or what he called "The Way" (*Dao*). This implies that a more just and orderly society is found not in an otherworldly heaven nor in a future earthly perfection, but in an already-experienced past. Confucianism is thus a prescriptive doctrine that claims to use historical evidence to re-create a just society on earth. This is completely different from the Christian and Islamic focus on an afterlife, as well as a Western Enlightenment focus on a forward-progressive future that views the past as "less developed" than both the present and the future.

Daoism, like Confucianism, is indigenous to China. Although widely practiced now as an elaborate folk religion, its roots are in the fourth-century BCE philosophical school of "The Way" (*Dao*), often spelled "Taoism" in English. This philosophy is in turn linked to Confucianism, in particular its focus on practicing ancient rituals and cultivating ethical behavior as a means of returning to "The Way," already experienced in a distant past. Philosophical Daoism rejects the Confucian emphasis on constant, conscious action, viewing this as a fatal flaw that paradoxically leads further from a state of harmony. Instead, it emphasizes spontaneous, unreflective thought and action.

Daoist folk religion is quite different, sketching out a cosmology filled with various deities who hold the offices of a celestial empire, including once-living people. Over the course of centuries there has been a mixing and borrowing of elements between Daoism and Buddhism, so that these belief systems have in part come to resemble each other.

Buddhism is the most widely practiced religion in the PRC, with some studies estimating up to one billion adherents. However, it is not uncommon for people to simultaneously practice to some degree Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Most believers follow Mahayana Buddhism, which arrived in East Asia as early as the third century BCE. It did not take hold initially because practices such as monasticism, celibacy, and a rejection of involvement in everyday life contradicted Confucian principles of filial piety and service to the Emperor. It gained traction in part when its adherents linked its world view with that of

Daoism. Over the past centuries these have mutually reinforced and borrowed from each other. For example, while mainstream Chinese Buddhism is much less scriptural than other forms of Buddhism, Daoism has come to be defined by a monastic lifestyle, with prohibitions against monks eating meat or drinking alcohol.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

One of several Buddhas in the Yungang caves and grottoes at Datong, Shanxi Province.

Islam and Christianity have been present in China for centuries, long before European intervention in the nineteenth century. Indeed, Islam dates to at least the eighth century, when it entered via the Silk Road and other trade routes. Estimates of the total number of Muslims ranges from 20 to 100 million, with most accounts suggesting around 40 million. Muslims are either ethnic minorities with distinct languages and cultural practices, such as Uyghurs, Kazaks, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Tartars, or Chinese-speakers classified as "Hui" people, who constitute both the largest Muslim group and largest minority group in the PRC, with a population of approximately 10 million. Hui ethnically are no different than Han Chinese, though this has not prevented them from being classified as a separate nationality.

Christianity reached China in the Tang Dynasty (618–907), when Nestorian monks traveled and preached in the region. The best known Christian missionary was Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), a Jesuit who spent twelve years in Beijing, from 1588 until 1600. Ricci spent much of his time translating Chinese texts into Latin and introducing new forms of science to the Imperial Court. His observatory remains in Beijing, a short walk from the Jianguomen metro station. Today, China officially has four million Catholics and ten million Protestants.

Visitors to China are often surprised at the extent of public religious worship. Mosques, churches, and temples are regularly filled with adherents, be these in cities or rural communities, Han Chinese, or minority regions. The government has spent large sums of money refurbishing and renovating religious sites that had been seized or damaged during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The government also funds Christian seminaries, Buddhist monasteries, and Islamic religious schools. But the limits to religious worship are clear: people can practice religion as long as they do so within the confines of state-recognized organizations. Thus, for example, all Christian churches must be affiliated with either the China Christian Council or the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, all Buddhist groups must be members of the Buddhist Association of China, and all Islamic organizations must be

linked to the Islamic Association of China. These state institutions are charged with ensuring freedom of worship while also promoting national unity. What this means in practice is that Chinese religious groups are not allowed to have separate links with international organizations. In other words, Chinese Catholics cannot have any official ties with the Vatican nor Tibetan Buddhists with the Dalai Lama, and foreign missionaries of any type are banned. This has led to the rapid growth of an informal "house" church movement among both Protestants and Catholics that may number as many as 100 million.

This has both political (because of the Communist Party's official atheistic position) and nationalistic reasons, because of missionary involvement in China during the late Qing and early Republican era (1860–1949). Christianity is closely associated with colonial humiliations, since missionaries were before 1949 legally allowed to proselytize and held diplomatic immunity. In addition, it is important to remember that one of the most deadly rebellions in modern Chinese history (the Taiping Rebellion, 1850–1864), was led by a man named Hong Xiuquan, who claimed to be Jesus' younger brother, sent to earth to establish the Kingdom of God. By the time this ended, more than 25 million had died.

In sum, the state of religious freedom remains ambiguous. Faith-based groups that look outside the state (Tibetan Buddhists, Muslims, and Vatican-loyal Catholics) remain suspect. However, new forms of communication and mobility make new forms of informal religious practice much easier. The government appears to assume that modernization will lead to a post-religious society, as has happened in Japan. Increased incomes, educational levels, and consumerism will lessen the pull of religion, thus providing social stability. Yet what appears to have happened in the short term is the opposite. For Muslims, for example, increased incomes and interaction with other Muslims in China and in the world have led some to identify more strongly with Islam. For many people of all faiths, the "opening up" of China to economic change and consumerism has also led to increased corruption, lax morality, weakened social and kin ties, and a worship of money. Indeed, for many the austerity of Maoist times is nostalgically remembered as a time of moral clarity, in sharp contrast to the amoral materialism of today's society. While this has led some to turn to established faiths, others have turned to charismatic movements that provoke new concerns among authorities.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

The City Mosque in Beijing.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the central concern of Confucianism?
2. Why did Mahayana Buddhism initially have difficulty taking hold?

Suggested Reading

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Other Books of Interest

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2. A United States Department of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) report entitled "International Religious Freedom Report 2006." — http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71338.htm

Lecture 7

The Search for Meaning

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Eric Karchmer's "Magic, Science, and Qigong in Contemporary China," chapter 16, in *China Off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*, edited by Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen.

xunzhao dao –
"search for a path or a meaning"

In the 1960s, Mao Zedong advocated an attack on China's past and the destruction of the "four olds" (beliefs, customs, traditions, and habits). Chairman Mao envisioned a society of selfless communists; in the short term what he got was a society of violence, in which youths attacked elders, social order collapsed, and Mao himself became an object of mass worship.

The Cultural Revolution began in the summer of 1966 and at its height in 1968 involved millions of youths organized into various Red Guard factions. They attacked and destroyed religious and cultural sites, seized, beat, and often killed state and party officials, teachers, and anyone suspected of ties to "the feudal" past. Order was only restored in early 1969 after Mao declared a movement to send urban youth to the countryside to learn from peasants, and the Red Army effectively took control of the state.

Many of these youth, who eventually numbered 17 million, were stuck in rural areas for a decade or more. Referred to as China's "lost generation," they came of age at a time when educational chances were nil, and suffered greatly. They also inflicted great suffering on others. This is a key reason why the general Chinese view of the radical sixties is radically different than the normative American view. Youthful rebellion in China is not associated with flower power, peace and love, and Woodstock, but with violence, destruction, and mass demonstrations in support of a cult-like leader.

© Eastern Vision Films

An actress portrays a revolutionary guard in an "anticonfucian" film made during the Cultural Revolution.

These former Red Guard militants are now the senior managers and civil servants in a fundamentally different China, one which has turned its back on Maoist

ideals. Finding someone who actually believes in communism, even among Communist Party members, is difficult. In a world turned upside down, in which CCP leaders dress like bankers, multinational corporate leaders are hosted by state officials, and people are told that getting rich is "glorious," what is left for people to believe in? Some people, perhaps a great many, focus on making money and consuming; others turn to nationalism, as we will later discuss; still others turn back to established religions. However, still others turn to alternative practices, as they have throughout China's history. These groups fall into two broad categories, quasi-medical and spiritual systems linked to the traditional concept of *qi*, and cult-like charismatic faith movements.

Many Americans have heard of *qigong* or *taiqi* (often spelled *taichi* in English). These are physical exercise practices that link body movement and breathing control (*qi* translates as "air" but means "vital energy"). For thousands of years Chinese have believed that harnessing one's *qi* prolongs life, cures illness, and enables a person to maintain both physical and mental balance. After being marginalized for decades after 1949, *qigong* and related spiritual and health practices grew rapidly in the late 1980s. They were seen by many as an alternative to increasingly expensive medical care at a time in which social services were being privatized. And because *qigong* and other practices are usually social, they also provided a new way for everyday citizens to belong to a community, however small and informal this might be, outside the confines and regulations of the then Party-controlled social order.

As these preventive and curative practices became more popular, charismatic leaders began to gain large followings. These masters claimed the power to both help a person cultivate internal *qi* and tap an outside source of *qi*. This was not actually new; masters of such practices have appeared throughout Chinese history, both within *qi* movements as well as in Daoist and Buddhist

© Scott Cunningham

A daily class in Tai Chi Chuan (literal translation "Supreme Ultimate Fist") is heavily attended at Laoxing Square in Loudi, Hunan Province.

communities. Like any social movement outside state oversight, Party officials were wary of these spiritual groups. As already noted, after 1949 the right to believe in an official religion (Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, or Daoism) was written into the Constitution, along with a counter-right to not believe. However, "superstition" (*mixin*), defined as any belief outside of officially prescribed groups, was banned. By the late 1980s, this presented a practical problem: *qigong*-type practices had become enormously popular, even among Communist Party members, so what to do? Government officials began to define "traditional" practices and "superstitions" based on what it asserted were scientific principles, in order to regain control of the charismatic spiritual movement.

One of the largest of these spiritual groups, Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, emerged in 1992 in Changchun, a gritty industrial city in the northeastern rustbelt. Founded by a former People's Liberation Army soldier and state grain clerk named Li Hongzhi, Falun Gong quickly became a national movement, preaching an eclectic message that mixed Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian principles with a Maoist moral code. In April 1999, the group staged a large demonstration in Beijing, which led to a harsh crackdown. Since then, Falun Gong has reconstituted itself overseas, and has become a vehement critic of the Chinese government. In the United States, it publishes the *Epoch Times* newspaper, funds a Chinese cultural show that tours widely, and has successfully lobbied numerous politicians to support its call for religious freedom in China.

Public Domain

Official portrait of the charismatic leader of the Falun Gong movement, Li Hongzhi (1951–).

Yet few Americans appear to be aware of what this group believes. At the core of Falun Gong belief is self-cultivation, a precept central to Chinese thought from Confucius to Mao. Li Hongzhi, however, stresses self-cultivation among ordinary people, not just among select people or monks. Like many such charismatic leaders in China, he argues that life can be prolonged through harnessing the power of *qi*. He also attacks homosexuality and racial-mixing as evil, believes that advanced civilizations once existed on earth, but have been covered up by scientists, and argues that aliens live among us. The mainly late middle-aged urban residents who made up the bulk of Li Hongzhi's followers at the height of his popularity in China are the people who have often suffered from the reform movement. Unlike former Red Guards, they are too old or too used to a state-directed lifestyle to survive in the uncertainties of an unregulated market society. They have watched their work units go out of business, the state health system collapse, and the last shred of broad belief in the value of state socialism be erased by the pursuit of wealth and corruption.

Viewed from their perspective, the claims of Li Hongzhi looked not just reasonable, but also attractive, as he offers a familiar belief system based on routine and order. This system, cloaked in the reified language of Science, which has been a staple of political discourse in China since the 1920s, offers salvation through following a prescribed set of practices and beliefs.

Of course, this does not explain why Falun Gong has gained so much popularity outside of China. (See the "Websites of Interest." The Falun Dafa Association website documents the alleged persecution of Falun Gong practitioners, provides copies of Li Hongzhi's speeches, and publicizes proclamations of recognition from various foreign politicians.) Falun Gong practitioners have become a familiar sight at Chinese New Year celebrations in the United States and at various public spaces, including the National Mall in Washington, DC.

Yet in a paradoxical way, the Falun Gong presence abroad illustrates the extent to which the movement has become a global product of the very forces against which it rose to prominence in China, namely the unfettered flow of capital, jobs, social practices, and different ways of envisioning the world. If Li Hongzhi's messianic message of rotating wheels and accumulations of merit once appealed to Chinese citizens who have suffered from the country's "opening up" to foreign capital, his message today primarily appeals to the winners of the global game, overseas Chinese citizens who have prospered materially in a class-defined global world and non-Chinese who seek out yet another "Eastern" fix to their spiritual quest.

© The Epoch Times

A group of Falun Gong practitioners protests persecution by Chinese authorities at the National Mall in Washington, DC, July 18, 2008.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did *qigong*-related practices grow rapidly in the late 1980s?
2. Why has the Falun Gong gained so much popularity outside of China?

Suggested Reading

Karchmer, Eric. Chapter 16. "Magic, Science, and Qigong in Contemporary China." *China Off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*. Eds. Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

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1. The official website of the *Falun Dafa Association*. — http://www.falundafa.org
2. The Congressional Research Service provides a neutral overview in its May 2006 report "China and Falun Gong." — http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/67820.pdf

Lecture 8

Ethnic Identity and Minority Rights

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is David Yen-Ho Wu's "The Construction of Chinese and Non-Chinese Identities," chapter 9, in *China Off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*, edited by Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen.

shaoshu minzu – "ethnic minorities"

According to official statistics, the population of China in 2009 was approximately 1.3 billion, 91.9 percent of whom were identified as part of the Han ethnic group. The non-Han population, numbering 100 million or so, is separated into fifty-five official national minority groups. These numbers offer the appearance of an orderly yet culturally and ethnically diverse nation-state, personified by state descriptions of China as a large "family" of peoples. Yet, as in many post-colonial states, the building of a national identity has been a continuous project, one filled with ambiguity and questions.

In a historical sense, the nation-state is a very recent phenomenon dating to perhaps the late nineteenth century. Before this, most societies in the world were empires, kingdoms, or loose confederations. The late Benedict Anderson described the modern nation-state as an "imagined community," built on shared memories, new forms of technology such as mass media, and government force. He also noted that most modern nation-states are in fact multinational states, since they contain not just one ethnic group, but usually several such groups. Building a nation thus often requires coercing or convincing minority groups to accept a new "national" identity.

Modern China is no different. Until the late nineteenth century the majority group of Qing subjects did not identify as either Chinese or as Han, but as members of a kin network or clan (such as the Lees or the Chens), as residents of a village or area, or as speakers of a shared dialect. This was not only because most people lived in rural communities and seldom traveled far from home. It is also a reflection of a Confucian geographic view: a civilized center ("the Middle Kingdom," the Chinese word for "China") was perpetually surrounded by lesser peoples who lacked to some degree the elemental features of civilization, such as a written language, particular forms of technology, and a historical record. In other words, this Confucian view did not define who was civilized and who was barbaric according to race or ethnicity, but by culture. Barbarians could become civilized (and thus "Chinese") members of the Middle Kingdom through learning. This cultural assimilation process enabled this Middle Kingdom to continuously absorb groups its armies conquered as well as those who conquered the center. The Middle Kingdom expanded, contracted, and shifted its geographic boundaries for centuries, yet survived.

Before the 1911 Revolution, opponents of the Qing faced an enormous problem: how to lead a nationalist revolution among people who not only did not perceive themselves to be a "nation," but in many cases did not even perceive themselves to be a united ethnic group. The ethnic marker "Han" refers to the Han dynasty, yet only became widely used during the Yuan Dynasty, when government officials used it to classify all northern peoples in the Kingdom, whatever their languages or cultural practices. Sun Yatsen nevertheless declared this to be the authentic ethnic category of all Chinese people. *Minzu*, variously translated as "ethnicity," "nation," and "race," and the first of Sun's "Three Principles of the People" (nationalism, democracy, and livelihood), is a direct borrowing from the Japanese *minzokushugi*, and never appeared in written Chinese before 1873. This is because the Chinese language did not have words to describe "ethnicities," "nations," or "races," since the world consisted not of these groups, but rather of "civilized" and generically "barbaric" peoples. Nevertheless, by evoking the "race" or "ethnicity" of a supposedly unified "Han" people, Dr. Sun could argue that they were being oppressed by a "foreign" race, the Manchu-centered Qing Dynasty, which rightfully should be overthrown. Once the Revolution had succeeded, however, Dr. Sun called on Han people to become "Chinese" by merging with non-Han groups to form a new nation.

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Dr. Sun Yatsen
(1866–1925)

Following the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the new government rejected self-determination for non-Chinese-speaking groups, but supported what it called cultural self-determination. In the early 1950s, the government established a commission of scholars and researchers to determine which groups qualified for official recognition as a "minority nationality." To qualify, a group had to demonstrate that it used a distinct language, was based in a specific territory, had a recognizable means of production, and possessed a shared world view. Fifty-five groups were granted recognition out of the more than four hundred that applied.

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A block-long billboard at a construction site on Niu Jie (Cow Street) in Beijing showing twelve of the fifty-five officially recognized ethnic groups of China.

While certain benefits apply to official national minorities, such as extra points on national university examinations and the right to have two children, state support for minority culture has been haphazard. Initially, the state funded efforts to support minority languages and cultural practices as a short-term policy, since Marxist theory stated these differences would eventually disappear once communism was achieved. But in the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), communist Red Guards viciously attacked minority religious and cultural sites, destroying and defacing temples and mosques, prohibiting the practice of cultural rituals, and forcing people to learn standard Chinese. These radical policies ended after the death of Mao and the start of social and economic reforms. This does not mean that minority groups have all achieved authentic cultural autonomy, however. Instead, groups are free to promote language and culture as long as these do not touch on politics. Thus, for example, while hundreds if not thousands of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and temples have been rebuilt with state funding, monks and lay people cannot have any ties with the Dalai Lama or other Tibetan exiles. A similar situation exists among Muslim groups in Xinjiang and other western areas.

While few people speak any longer of an inevitable Marxist revolution that will erase ethnic differences, many Han Chinese now presume the inevitability of modernization and a homogeneous culture. From the perspective of the government, the Communist Party, and arguably the majority of Han Chinese, minority peoples are less advanced and thus should be grateful for help in becoming modern. Many are convinced that the government has spent large sums of money developing minority regions and are baffled that minority groups complain or protest. This is why many Han Chinese react with anger to foreign protests for Tibetan independence, or demand stronger police action when ethnic riots break out in Lhasa or in Xinjiang.

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Tibetan monk on top of Drepung monastery near Lhasa in the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

Although the percentage of minorities is relatively small, the total number (upwards of 100 million) and their location (mainly in border regions, stretching from Yunnan in the Southwest to Inner Mongolia in the North) is a key state security issue. The most homogeneous minority area is the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), in which 92 percent of 4.6 million residents are Tibetan. In contrast, only 17 percent (4 million) of residents in the vast Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region are Mongolian.

Photograph: © Basil Thornton/shutterstock.com; map: Maps.com

An ethnic Uyghur couple negotiates one of the numerous high-mountain passes in western Xinjiang Province (dark green in the inset image) near the Karakoram Road. The road winds its way through the mountains from the city of Kashgar in Xinjiang, along the borders with Tajikistan and Afghanistan into Pakistan. Kashgar is approximately 2,726 miles from Beijing.

Ethnic relations in China are not quite the rosy official picture of a "happy family" of different ethnicities living in harmony. As the country modernizes, incomes rise, and different groups encounter each other, ethnic differences are not disappearing, but may well be hardening, even among the supposedly uniform "Han." Moreover, certain minority groups do not fit into state-defined boxes. Tibetans and Uyghurs, for example, hold fast to world religions, identify with outside groups, not with Han Chinese, and generally reject the notion of Han superiority. Popular Han stereotypes of Muslims and Tibetans as "fierce" and "dangerous" people also indicate the non-Chinese place these groups hold in popular culture. While minority rights are certainly stronger now than they were in past decades, the extent to which non-Han peoples identify as Chinese remains a question.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did Dr. Sun Yatsen evoke the ethnicity of the Han people?
2. To what extent have minority groups achieved cultural autonomy?

Suggested Reading

Yen-Ho Wu, David. Chapter 9. "The Construction of Chinese and Non-Chinese Identities." *China Off-Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*. Eds. Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

Other Books of Interest

Blum, Susan D. Chapter 8. "Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity in Kunming." *China Off-Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*. Eds. Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

Websites of Interest

1. The Human Rights in China (HRIC) website was founded by Chinese students and scholars in 1989. It is an international Chinese nongovernmental organization whose mission is to promote international human rights and advance the institutional protection of these rights in the People's Republic of China. — http://www.hrichina.org
2. Public Radio International's website *The World* provides the transcript of a report entitled "Ethnic Identity in China" by Mary Kay Magistad, which aired in July 2009. — http://www.theworld.org/2009/07/13/ethnic-identity-in-china

Lecture 9

Environmental Issues

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robert P. Weller's *Discovering Nature: Globalization and Environmental Culture in China and Taiwan*.

ziran jie – "the natural world"

News reports on China often highlight the country's serious environmental problems. As industrial output has risen, environmental safeguards, like labor standards, have been relaxed or ignored, resulting in widespread water and air pollution, as well as trash, noise, and transportation problems. In the buildup to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the central government began to focus on these issues, though improvements have been slow. The environmental challenges of improving the material lives of fully one-quarter of the world's population requires a contextual presentation. It is important to understand the place of nature within Chinese traditions in order to better understand how preservation, pollution, and conservation issues are confronted by the current government and society.

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China's Diverse Environments

Top Left: The limestone hills of Yangshou, Guangxi; Top Right: The Four Sisters Mountain in Sichuan; Bottom Right: A lone visitor in the Gobi Desert in Sinkiang; Bottom Left: A fisherman on the Yangtze River.

Unlike in post-Enlightenment Europe, a nature/culture divide is not part of a normative Confucian world view. Instead, humans have historically been imagined to be at the center of a world filled with human-like objects and beings, not separate from a natural sphere. This simultaneous anthropocentric and anthropomorphic world view can be contrasted with an Enlightenment view of humans transcending and conquering nature, found in the writing of thinkers such as René Descartes, John Locke, Karl Marx, and John Stuart Mill. The word "nature" in Chinese (*da zi ran*) translates as "all coming into being" and implies a self-evident spontaneity. This conveys neither the English language sense of an essential quality (such as a "natural" food or a naturally as opposed to "man-made" product), nor of an all-controlling force that directs reality, such as a "natural catastrophe." The latter is described with the word *tian* (literally "heaven" or "sky"), a word also used to describe in some situations "God."

The Chinese notion of "nature" combines a Daoist accommodation with the world, a Buddhist reference for all life, and a Confucian emphasis on managing reality. What links these three distinct cosmologies is a shared notion of *qi* as the fundamental energy source of life. People and the world of things are linked together, and this world of things exists to benefit people, who in turn are stewards of all things. The underlying principle in this view is harmony, not conquest or control.

The communist victory in 1949 fundamentally altered this relationship. Mao Zedong unleashed massive violence against nature in the name of "scientific" development, replacing the foundational concept of heaven and earth living in harmony (*tian-ren heyi*) with a call to conquer nature (*rending shengtian*). During the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the government invested in massive dam, highway, and industrial projects as well as the opening up of new agricultural lands in the northeast, the far west, and Inner Mongolia. These projects were often carried out by displaced urban youth and disgraced urban intellectuals who knew nothing about farming. The negative impact of these policies is still being felt. Like Mao's decree that Chinese should try to have as many children as possible, his environmental policies ignored science in favor of willpower.

© Pacific Environment

An unofficial trash dump near a waterway in Hubei.

While both the government and society at large have placed more awareness on environmental issues in recent years, regulatory attempts encounter the negative side effects of

lax economic development policies. For example, because civil society is relatively weak, the concept of a public sphere or the common good also is relatively weak. Combined with little market regulation and widespread corruption, many factory owners have no incentives not to pollute.

Nevertheless, interest in environmental issues is growing, spurring some citizens to take action. In 1994, the "Friends of Nature" was established in Beijing, becoming perhaps the first nongovernmental and nonparty organization to be tolerated by the state since 1949. Other such groups have followed, which has led some outside observers to speculate that an authentic civil society is emerging. However, it is crucial to understand that NGO groups usually do not openly contest state power or critique state policies, but instead aim to work with government institutions. In other words, "the state" is not seen as an opponent, but as an ally against private entrepreneurs and corrupt local officials.

By 2005, China had approximately two hundred private groups, eleven hundred student groups, and fourteen hundred government-organized environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs). These groups focus on consumer education and changing cultural habits such as public smoking, littering, and traffic control—all of which mesh neatly with government efforts to "civilize" (*wenming*) citizens. This explicitly non-political approach is also demonstrated in the language these groups use to describe their activities. They speak of carrying out projects (*xiangmu*) and actions (*xiandong*) for the public good, not of mounting public demonstrations or conducting public campaigns (*yundong*).

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A sign prohibiting littering, smoking, and spitting on a train in Beijing.

A strategy of working with the government and Party on environmental issues makes sense politically, given the authoritarian structure of power. But these groups also generally hold a very different view of the environment than found in places like Europe and the United States. Specifically, they do not romanticize an ideal "nature" free of humans. This marks a return to a Confucian-Daoist-Buddhist view of humans being embedded within nature. This is very different than the biocentric perspective that dominates the global environmental movement, which emphasizes conserving environmental spaces free of any permanent human presence. We see this, for example, in the structure of our national parks: it would seem odd to most Americans to designate a park space that includes, say, a town or community. Yet in China the notion of finding people living in a national park space is not at all odd.

The place of what we call "the environment," and in particular the relationship between what we think of as a space of "nature" and a separate space of "culture," take on different forms in China. The Maoist demand to conquer nature, to beat it down and control it, no longer dominates the public discourse. But relatively few people, whether inside or outside the government and Party, have embraced the Euro-American environmentalist demand for conservation of pristine lands. This is not because people do not care about the environment, but because what constitutes this, and what role humans play within it, are questions that do not have objective, universally valid answers. In practical material terms, balancing environmental and human development concerns in a country as large as China offers no clear solutions. Should the majority of Chinese citizens continue to ride bicycles and crowded buses, while Europeans and North Americans enjoy private cars, just because this is better for a global environment? These and other issues are not static. They are spurring widespread experimentation. China has become a key player in alternative energy forms, ranging from affordable solar and wind generation to biogas. During the Beijing Games, the city government instituted a vehicle-control policy, limiting the number of cars in core areas. This policy proved so popular it has been continued. Beijing and other cities have also begun experimenting with mandated recyclable bags as a way of eliminating the millions of plastic bags generated by mass consumption. The government has invested tens of millions of dollars in non-polluting mass transit in dozens of cities, as well as in a nationwide reforestation campaign. While enormous problems remain, it would be dangerous to dismiss new environmental policies as simplistic or "window dressing."

© Photo by Jack Liu/Michigan State University

An increasing amount of cropland on hills in China has been converted to forest as part of a government conservation program. This photo of the Wolong Nature Reserve in Sichuan Province shows stands of conifers planted in 2000.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How does the Chinese view of "natural" differ from the Enlightenment view?
2. Why have few Chinese embraced the Euro-American environmentalist demand for conservation of pristine lands?

Suggested Reading

Weller, Robert P. *Discovering Nature: Globalization and Environmental Culture in China and Taiwan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

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2. Xinhua News Agency article "China Begins Huge Reforestation Effort" from May 15, 2002. — http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-05/15/content_394262.htm

Lecture 10

Culture, Heritage, and the Growth of Tourism

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Timothy Oakes's "Ethnic Tourism in Rural Guizhou: Sense of Place and the Commerce of Authenticity," chapter 2, in *Tourism, Ethnicity, and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies*, edited by Michel Picard and Robert E. Wood.

yichan – "heritage"
lüyou – "travel-tourism"

The privatization of the state economy and work-unit housing has not just increased incomes and created a new class of homeowners, it has spurred an enormous increase in tourism. And, contrary to popular images outside of China, the vast majority of tourists in China are Chinese, either local or overseas. In fact, more than 90 percent of an annual total of 1.3 billion tourists are domestic travelers, and approximately 80 percent of the remainder are residents of Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, or Taiwan. Only around 1 percent of all tourists are Europeans and North Americans.

Tourism has been part of Chinese life for centuries. By the Ming Dynasty it was common for the wealthy and literati to visit famous sites, while pious people would go on pilgrimages to famous Daoist and Buddhist temples and monasteries. Lists of "scenic spots" (*jingdian*) actually date as far back as the second century BCE. By the sixteenth century a list of several hundred such destinations existed. Ranging from mountains and valleys to rock formations, individual stones and carvings, and places of historical importance, these sites were (and still are) supposed to evoke not a personal response, but instead a shared experience. For example, a mountain, particular vista, or scene is linked to both literary allusions (such as in famous poems or historical accounts) and anthropomorphic signs (with hills, rocks, and trees given particular names). A visit to a famous site such as Yellow Mountain in Anhui Province or Mount Ermei in Sichuan illustrates this: while an outsider will see rocks covered with painted characters or odd-looking trees being photographed, people who understand the cultural code behind these sites will see places in which famous people once stood, or painted, or fought. When Americans experience a famous site such as the Yangtze River or Great Wall, they see a river or a wall, whereas Chinese visitors see places linked to poetry, history, and foundational cultural narratives.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

A sign requesting visitors to respect the grounds and artifacts in Chengde, Hubei Province, which was a political center of the Chinese empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Tourism is also a very social practice in China. Most people would think it odd for someone to go off on a trip alone. Instead, people travel in groups, with family, friends, or classmates, not to "find themselves," but to have fun and visit places that have made it onto the list of famous sites. Travel is thus very different than the modernist ideal of a person going off alone to strange places in order to learn about who they are. Of course, some critics would argue that in China most people are tourists, not travelers. This is a view that romanticizes one form of tourism and condemns all other forms: for these elites, tourists simply lose themselves by escaping from the banality of everyday life. A good many Chinese tourists might well agree with this sentiment, although without accepting its biased perspective. After all, in China when people go on vacation they literally "play" (*wan*). They would no doubt find it odd to go off to a strange place alone and be surrounded by strangers (the traveler's quest), as well they should.

These days, what counts as a scenic spot includes everything and everyone from the ancestral homes of Confucius and Mao to Mickey Mouse, imperial steeles (official memorial columns) and urban shopping malls. During the two annual "golden weeks" of travel, the spring festival in late January and National Day on October 1, upwards of 100 million people travel, clogging train stations, airports, and hotels. In addition, more and more people are taking summer vacations to places farther and farther from home. The revolutionary

© George Yu

The Ying Ke Pine, or "Welcome Pine," on Yellow Mountain.

The area Huangshan (Yellow Mountain) is known for its scenery, remarkable sunsets, peculiarly shaped granite peaks, pine trees, and views of the clouds from above. The mountain is a frequent subject of traditional Chinese paintings and literature, as well as modern photography. Today, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of China's major tourist destinations.

implications of this must be emphasized: until the early 1990s there was almost no domestic tourism outside of state work units. Indeed, when most people worked for state enterprises it was exceedingly difficult to travel without official permission. All of this has changed with a strong government emphasis on increasing tourism to interior and rural areas as a development tool, especially to minority regions such as Tibet, Yunnan, and Guizhou. In 2008, a railroad linking Lhasa with China proper opened, which has increased Chinese arrivals in the city to nearly three million per year. This has had a significant impact on the city and has raised concerns about the tourist impact on Tibetan cultural institutions. Just as important, however, is the relationship between tourism and cultural heritage. The Chinese government has recently become a strong backer of the world heritage movement spearheaded by UNESCO, and has invested significant sums into restoring monuments, temples, and other important historical sites. Yet it was the Communist Party that just two generations ago led a campaign to destroy China's material past. What has led to this remarkable change?

Economic development partly explains this shift: heritage tourism can bring jobs to poorer regions that have not attracted much investment. But political reasons play a major role. Like national museums and monuments, cultural heritage programs are inevitably political, given that they seek to shape accepted narratives about specific aspects of the past. In the context of places such as Tibet, state-supported heritage programs enable the national government to portray itself as the guardian of China's national heritage, in the process claiming Tibetan sites such as the Potala Palace, the Dalai Lama's former home, as "Chinese." These programs also support a nationalist campaign that selectively links some aspects of China's past to its ongoing social and economic changes. Encouraging nationalist sentiments is also a way of providing a rationale for Communist Party rule at a time in which the Party has largely abandoned Marxism.

On the other hand, government support for historic preservation is certainly an improvement on state-sanctioned destruction. Yet cultural perceptions of what it means to "preserve" material culture in China often clash with European and American views. For Americans, "preservation" and "restoration" are linked to a sense of authenticity and antiquity: old is good. However, in Chinese aesthetics authenticity is not necessarily tied to age. For example, in Chinese Buddhism

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Chinese tourists at the Black Stone Forest in Yunnan Province.

adherents have traditionally gained merit by funding temple building and repairs, not on preserving existing buildings. Moreover, new temples are often built on the site of former temples, because the site and not the actual building is the marker of authenticity. In addition, temples of all types commonly undergo regular renewal rituals involving painting buildings and even statues, much like in India with Hindu temples. The eighth-century Leshan Buddha, a giant statue carved out of a cliff in Sichuan Province, was recently repainted, which from a Western perspective might "cheapen" its appearance, but from a Chinese and Buddhist perspective is completely logical. After all, for a Buddhist, material culture is an illusion.

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Leshan Giant Buddha in Mt. Emei.

Tourism certainly cannot avoid influencing local culture, though this happens in ways that are not necessarily about the dangers of commercializing culture. In some minority regions, increased tourism has actually strengthened local identity, boosted incomes, and led to a paradoxical problem: after decades of a communist ideological focus on revolution, how does a minority go about learning how to be an authentic ethnic minority again? The Chinese tourist boom in Tibetan regions has been partly responsible for a Tibet craze among cosmopolitan elites in urban areas of China. Images of Tibet are used to sell beer and mineral water, while Tibetan jewelry and religious artwork are hot fashion items. A small but growing backpacker culture among students and young professionals has also developed, visiting the rural frontier regions such as Tibet, the far northeast, and Yunnan province. But there is little evidence that shows these backpackers are attracted to places such as Tibet for the same romanticized reasons as foreigners; Tibet might be remote, beautiful, and filled with exotic practices, but from a Chinese perspective it is still "uncivilized." And, as anti-Chinese riots in Lhasa in 2008 demonstrated, increased interaction between Han Chinese tourists and Tibetans has not led to greater mutual understanding, but to more mutual antipathy. In this sense, mass tourism by Han Chinese to remote regions might be reinforcing a sense of a multicultural China in them, but not in their minority "hosts."

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the Chinese notion of the "traveler"?
2. How is the Chinese view of preservation different from an American view?

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Lecture 11

Music, Film, and "Soft" Rebellion

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Andrew Jones's "The Politics of Popular Music in Post-Tiananmen China," chapter 15, in *China Off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*, edited by Susan D. Blum and Lionel M. Jensen.

wnhua chongtu – "cultural clash"

It is tempting for some people to romanticize the role of fiction, film, and music in questioning authority and building a counterculture. The narrative of rebel artists speaking against a totalitarian system has been a staple of modernism since at least the 1920s in Europe and North America. In some cases, such as the former Czechoslovakia, poets, writers, and other artists did indeed play a crucial role in bringing down the communist state. But artistic rebellion against a hybrid market authoritarian system such as China's is actually more difficult, not so much because "the state" necessarily cares what artists say, but because it is more difficult to gain the attention of a domestic audience. Some commentators use the term "market Leninism" to describe this system. Like more conventional Leninist political systems such as the former Soviet Union and Maoist China, "market Leninism" asserts that the Communist Party must act as the vanguard of society. However, unlike these previous systems, market Leninism encourages private market activity, including the arts, as long as these do not question the role of the Party. Thus, all aspects of life in China are now part of "the market." If something sells, it is good. But in terms of political dissent, this raises a practical question: if dissent is not about making money but seeking social change, is dissent even possible in the Chinese media industries?

More practically, what is the aim of any subculture in a modern consumer society: to convert others, to engage in symbolic protests, to seek power, or to offer an alternative lifestyle? And if such movements are in fact more about lifestyle than politics, is this not just another form of consumer choice? China, in other words, while a society dominated by an authoritarian state, is also a mass consumer society. In this sense, it has more in common with the United States than we might think, once we look beyond abstract notions of "freedom" versus "censorship." Artistic freedom in China is just as tied to market realities as it is in the United States.

© Dr. Ira Hutchison, Northern Michigan University

A modern couple displaying affection in public at the Shanghai train station, an indication of changing times.

In addition to practicing market Leninism, the Chinese state is also an example of soft authoritarianism, especially when it comes to cultural industries.

This is very different than the China of pre-Tiananmen days. Before the 1990s, the government spent a great deal of effort censoring films and preventing certain artists and musicians from performing. Rock music was particularly targeted as a foreign borrowing that preached a radical message of individualism. This rock music call for personal freedom was echoed by student protestors in 1989. One of the most influential musicians of that time was a young man named Cui Jian, an ethnic Korean and generally considered the "father" of Chinese rock music. Trained as a trumpet player at the prestigious Beijing Music Conservatory, he was once assigned to the Beijing Philharmonic Orchestra. Beginning in the early 1980s, he started to play alternative music in small clubs in Beijing. He became a nationwide sensation in 1986 after performing what would turn out to be his first hit song, "*Yi Wu Suoyou*" (*Nothing to My Name*), at a Beijing concert. This song would later become an anthem of the 1989 student movement and lead to Cui Jian's banning by state authorities in 1989. In 1990, he was temporarily "unbanned" in order to headline a national tour designed to raise money for the 1990 Asian Games held in Beijing. The tour itself was cancelled midway through, largely because of the huge crowds Cui Jian drew. As China has opened up over the past decade, Cui Jian has become a national music figure. Although he has performed throughout Asia, Europe, and North America, he continues to live and work in Beijing.

Cui's music is a good example of the complexities and ambiguities of how market forces influence dissent and censorship. This is made even more complex because of the high degree of emphasis the Chinese language places on metaphor, an emphasis seen in the political language of the Party and the market language of economic reforms. For example, his hit song *Nothing to My Name*, released on the album *The New Long March* (1988), joins traditional Chinese instruments with electric guitars, while the haunting lyrics either describe a young man's laments for a girl who has broken his heart, *or* a man's anger at a one-Party state that has promised him so much:

© Ben J Wong/Flickr/Cui Jian at 2007 Hohaiyan

Musician Cui Jian in concert at the Hohaiyan Rock Festival in Taiwan, July 8, 2007.

I want to give you my dreams,
And give you my freedom.
But you always laugh at me,
Nothing to my name.

Similarly, Cui's later song *Hongqi Xiade Dan* (1994) literally translates as *Balls Under the Red Flag*, but actually means *Children of the Red Flag*, since *Xiade Dan* is Beijing slang for "dropping an egg," to give birth. In this song, he addresses the ambiguities many Chinese feel about the reform movement:

Suddenly things have started, although none of this is a surprise
Opportunities have arrived, but who knows what to do?
The Red Flag is still waving, without a fixed direction
The Revolution still continues, the old men still have power.

Cui Jian has never gone into exile, but instead has spent his career negotiating the gray line between meaningful expression and self-censorship. He travels and plays widely in China, East Asia, and even Europe and the United States. He is thus a good example of the difficulty in clearly defining what constitutes artistic dissent.

In the years since 1989, the public place of pop music has increased in China but has taken on many forms, ranging from heavy metal and grunge to syrupy "Canto-Pop" (Hong Kong), Taiwanese, and South Korean pop. As in other consumer societies, little of this is overtly political, and when it is, it tends to be rabidly nationalistic and anti-foreign, with, for example, the music of the popular heavy metal band Tang Dynasty. This strong nationalist sentiment, far from being a threat to Party control, actually supports the Communist Party's own cultivation of Chinese nationalism.

The assumption that rock music will automatically serve as a platform for political dissent and a more pluralistic society is, at least in this case, flawed. This assumption has less to do with the realities of China than it does with an American infatuation with the sixties. As already noted, the dominant Chinese view of *their* sixties (the time of the Cultural Revolution) is not peace and love but mass chaos and violence. Soft rebellion in today's China is more about lifestyle than actual dissent. People can dress and act as they want, listen to different forms of music, make experimental films, even engage in recreational drug use, as long as they do not challenge Party rule.

Of course, musical lyrics are censored, as are print and film media, and production companies are state enterprises. But these companies are self-funding and need to build audiences. Like media markets anywhere, controversy sells: the trick for music companies, publishing houses, newspapers, and magazines is understanding how far to go and when to self-censor.

This fact, along with the domestic piracy problem (far more serious than the pirating of American movies and CDs) has led some film directors to specialize in targeting an elite foreign audience. These films tend to be highly abstract

and not very popular within China. But these films can bring international notice at film festivals and international release. This is in turn a practical way to guarantee a stream of revenues, given the rampant piracy of films within China. The most famous of these directors is Zhang Yimou, who has been making art house films for two decades—from *Red Sorghum* (1987) to *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). Zhang also directed the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games. He is famous among international critics, but in China directors such as Feng Xiaogang are far more popular. Unlike Zhang, Feng's films are set in contemporary China and use satire and comedy to discuss the everyday problems regular people face in a hyper-modernizing society. One of his biggest hits was *Big Shot's Funeral*, a 2001 satire about, among other things, a foreign fascination with an exotic orientalized China and the commodification of all aspects of modern life. It co-stars Donald Sutherland, who plays a Hollywood director producing a remake of the film *The Last Emperor*, who drops off into a deep coma, but not before tasking a streetwise Chinese cameraman played by the comic actor Ge You with staging his public funeral. Feng's latest film, *If You Are the One* (2008), grossed $45 million in its first year of release, a high figure in China.

© Taihe/Columbia/The Kobal Collection/Rafael Wiher

DVD cover of the 2003 Taihe/Columbia release of *Big Shot's Funeral* directed by Feng Xiaogang.

The struggle to make meaningful films, like music, now takes place within a profit-maximizing consumer culture; dissent is much harder when very few people care about transformative politics and making money drives most decisions.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is "market Leninism"?
2. To what extent has Cui Jian practiced artistic dissent?

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3. The University of Oregon's *East and Southeast Asia: An Annotated Directory of Internet Resources* website provides an extensive listing of sites discussing contemporary Chinese cinema. — http://newton.uor.edu/Departments&Programs/AsianStudiesDept/china-film.html

Lecture 12

Censorship in a Digital Society

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Guobin Yang's *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online*.

diannao wang – "Internet"

For many people, the Internet is a value-free world of open information that cannot be controlled. A statement such as, "information wants to be free" seems self-evident. The fact that information cannot desire anything, is often not free, but costs money, and is filtered and controlled in multiple ways by multiple actors even in American society is ignored, especially when this involves the Internet. Stories about Internet censorship in China paradoxically criticize Chinese government attempts to restrict the free flow of information while simultaneously hinting that such a program is impossible. We are left with vague allusions to a "Great Wall" of control and widespread online restrictions. These images are bolstered when American companies such as Google are praised for choosing to leave China's domestic market rather than accept censorship.

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Patrons relax in comfortable chairs at a Beijing cyber cafe in 2007.

But when foreigners visit China, they encounter the Internet literally everywhere. Homes, offices, and hotels are wired, and tens if not hundreds of thousands of cyber cafes are found throughout the country, from the largest cities to the smallest communities. An estimated 250 million to 330 million users are online, and this number continues to grow. How does one reconcile the outside critique of a state-controlled virtual world with the domestic reality of widespread use?

The answer is that both perspectives are correct. The Chinese government devotes significant resources to monitoring Internet usage. State agencies use search term filters, block many international websites, and even hire people to post in online forums and try to guide conversations away from sensitive topics. Most recently, the government has proposed a law requiring people to use their real names online instead of pseudonyms. They also constantly issue calls for proper moral conduct online. These government policies do not deter

hundreds of millions of Chinese "netizens" from surfing the Net. The question to ask is thus not, "Is the Internet censored in China?", because it is. A more practical question is, "What do Chinese people do online, given the information limits imposed by the government?"

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We can start by reflecting on the widespread notion in American society that the Internet is a foundation for freedom. Since its emergence as a mass communication tool in the late 1980s, the Internet has been portrayed as not just a communications breakthrough, but as a knowledge revolution. This is in part because it theoretically functions as not just a one-to-one information flow (like telephones) or a one-to-many flow (like print media), but also as a many-to-many flow. It thus enables anyone (in theory) to post anything to an infinite audience, bypassing (again in theory) corporate and state control of information and transcending identity boundaries. The utopian view of the Internet claims it transcends linguistic, political, ethnic, racial, and most every other identity marker. In a rather remarkable way, this image harkens back to an early twentieth-century utopian view of a transcendental humanist movement.

The realities of the Internet in practice are very different. First, corporations do not disappear online, unless one thinks Google, Microsoft, and other giants are not businesses. Second, online access and usage can be easily tracked by class status in most societies. And most importantly, recent research suggests that social networks, one of the primary uses of the Internet, are not erasing identity borders, but in fact are solidifying these. Most people who use social networks do so to seek out other like-minded people, just as most people visit websites for news and information that reinforces their opinions. Thus, the so-called "space of freedom" provided by the Internet tends to actually take the form of separate spaces, delineated by political, lifestyle, and ideological views. This is far from the idealized image of an online forum of competing voices, politely engaging in rational debate. In this sense, an image of the Internet as a space for cosmopolitan and pluralistic tolerance is very similar to an idealized image of nongovernmental organizations as inherently just, tolerant, and democratic. It makes no more sense to assume that all government critics are tolerant and democratic as it does to assume all Internet users are.

Of course, the vast majority of Americans who go online are neither democracy activists nor intolerant militants. Research shows that most people in the United States use the Internet to shop, read sports news, gamble, play games,

watch television shows, look at pornography, social network, and download music and films (often illegally). If this is what American consumers do online, why should we assume that Chinese consumers will spend their time online searching for dissident political or religious news?

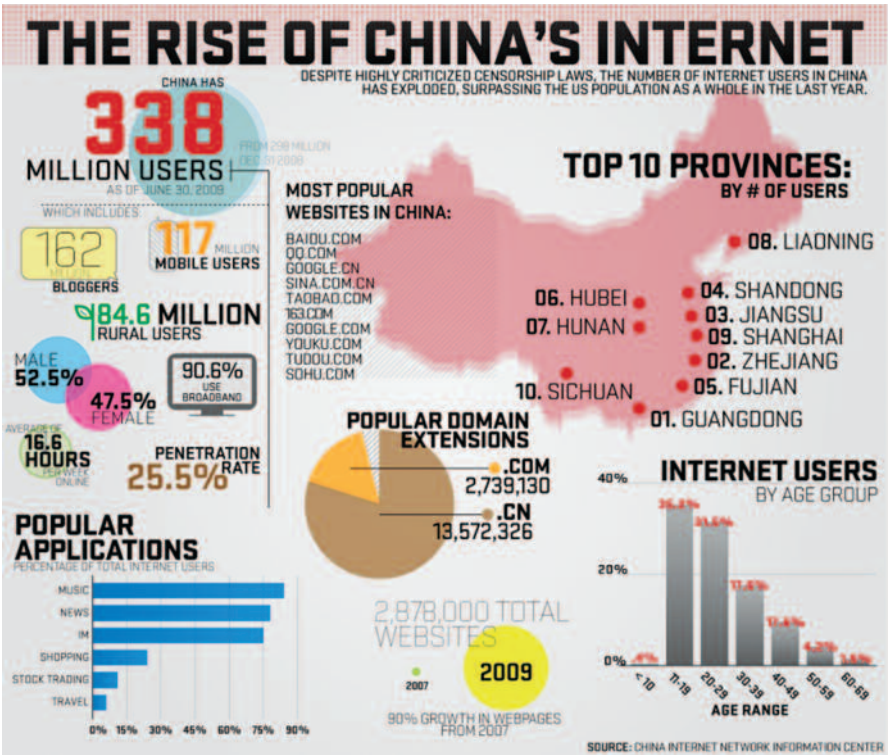
Surveys show that Net users in China tend to go online for the same reasons that most people do in the United States. A pessimist might conclude that the Internet is therefore not a magic tool that will lead to significant social change and a more open society. Instead, the Internet might well function as an extension of television and its supposed mindless entertainment. A more optimistic view would agree that there is relatively little political activism directly challenging the state visible online in China, but would note that looking for specific forms of political action (such as open calls for rebellion) limits what counts as political activism. Instead of beginning with a desired outcome (say, political democracy activism), not finding this, and concluding that the Net is completely controlled in China, it is more useful to try to understand what Chinese people do online.

Electronic bulletin board services (BBS) are much more widely used in China than in the United States. Unlike social networks such as *Facebook*, these are not exclusive, but are open to anyone. And, while many BBS sites focus on entertainment, sports, and popular culture issues, a significant number are political. Scholar Guobin Yang classifies these in two categories. First are debates and conversations about discrimination, such as against HIV-positive people, migrants, and the physically handicapped. Second are sites devoted to publicizing material complaints, such as housing and land issues, corruption, and consumer safety. These sites are not only usually not censored or shut down, but they often serve as an information source for central government officials to pressure local officials to take action.

Importantly, these grievances are often a result of the ongoing economic and social reform process, and focus on what people believe they have lost as a result of these changes. Complaining online about local corruption, or the loss of one's home in the name of urban development, or increased transit fares, is not necessarily a potential basis for a sweeping demand for democracy. These are about specific material concerns. Chinese citizens are well aware of what cannot be discussed online, because what is banned in the virtual world is what is banned in the printed world: Falun Gong, June 4, the Dalai Lama, any independence movement, and above all anything that questions the leadership of the Communist Party. Is online activism a sign of an authentic civil society? Yes and no; clearly a great many Chinese citizens take the language of rights seriously, particularly consumer rights. And online movements do provide citizens with a means of speaking back to power. But these generally follow the tactics of the environmental movement—they do not try to threaten state power.

Outsiders are also mistaken to downplay the place of intolerance in the Chinese virtual world. Like the Internet in the United States and other countries, China's online communities have their share of nationalists, bigots, and patriots. It is naïve to think that bloggers and posters who speak of their homeland with love and denounce foreign criticisms must be Communist party spies, brainwashed zealots, or sadly misinformed. Why is it difficult to accept that many Chinese people, whether online or in "real" life, can simultaneously complain about social problems, criticize government actions, and bristle at foreign criticism of China?

The Internet in China is a big business, as it is elsewhere. State power shapes online conversations, not literally through blanket control, but in part because of the assumption of control. This is much like the way "the state" shapes other communication and information forms. So while censorship obviously exists, this in itself does not make online conversations meaningless.



A multigraph presenting recent (June 30, 2009) statistics on Internet usage in China.

(Graphs compiled by the Decho Corp., an online backup service for consumers and small businesses owned by EMC Corporation, from information furnished by the China Internet Network Information Center.)

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How does the reality of Internet use differ from American perceptions?
2. How does the Internet enhance political activism in China?

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4. The *Mozy Blog* provides information about online backup services for consumers and small businesses in Asia and around the world, including those doing business in China. — http://mozy.com/blog

Lecture 13

Culture and Identity: Is Chinese Life Becoming Westernized?

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Michael Dutton's *Streetlife China*, part V, "Stories of the Fetish: Tales of Chairman Mao."

shixiyanghua? – "Westernization?"

The streets of urban China offer a snapshot of how quickly mass consumption has taken hold in the country. Advertisements for a range of products familiar to most Americans dot billboards on streets, buildings, and subway stations. Nike has more than three thousand outlets in the country, McDonald's just over one thousand, and Pizza Hut approximately five hundred. But these companies are overshadowed by Kentucky Fried Chicken, which had over twenty-eight hundred outlets by 2009, with plans to add four-hundred twenty-five more in 2010. It is not just fast food and sneakers that have gained a place in Chinese society. Everything from American shampoos and chocolate to high-end clothing chains and boutiques fight for a share of the domestic consumer market. While much attention is placed on investment in Chinese export industries such as cheap textiles, shoes, and household items, foreign companies are increasingly putting resources into the domestic production of "foreign" goods.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

A row of delivery bicycles outside a KFC restaurant in Beijing. Currently, Yum! (the parent company of KFC) has outlets in 650 Chinese cities and opens a new KFC nearly every day in mainland China.

On the surface, this appears to be a good example of how globalization also functions as a process of "westernization." Proponents of this view, such as *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, argue that societies are increasingly linked together through a flow of goods, ideas, and people, which will eventually lead to a truly "global" society. In other words, free markets bring not just material prosperity, but also a more peaceful world (Friedman famously argued that countries that have McDonald's restaurants do not go to war with each other). While this process might bring increased cultural uniformity, this is not to be lamented, but accepted as an unavoidable by-product. From this perspective, fighting against increased cultural sameness in an interconnected world is as futile as trying to hold the sea back with your hands. Open borders and the flow of people, goods, and communications also have led to the creation of new transnational cultural forms, often referred to as "new social movements" that link like-minded people up in ways not possible before the Internet. In advanced industrial societies such as the United States, many argue that new social movements, ranging from country-specific issues such as Darfur and Myanmar to issues such as AIDS, sexual orientation, and music, have displaced former broad-based social movements such as the labor, anti-war, and women's rights movements of the mid-twentieth century. In China, the best examples of new social movements in action are the Falun Gong spiritual movement and the Tibetan exile movement. I have already noted the remarkable success Falun Gong has achieved through cultivating an online transnational presence. The Tibetan exile government has been just as successful; many Americans now identify with Tibet in ways that are starkly different from how they identify with other independence movements, despite perhaps knowing little about Tibet or its relationship with China.

This optimistic picture of globalization as a historical force is remarkably similar to Walter Rostow's description of modernization theory more than fifty years ago. A march toward a global order of mass consumerism is presented as inevitable, almost as a historical law. Globalization, and by implication westernization, simply happens and cannot be stopped.

Many critics of globalization accept this claim as true, but reach the opposite conclusion: markets do bring a global monoculture, but this is bad. These critics, often associated with the political left, find themselves in uncomfortable alliances. For example, the socially conservative wing of the Chinese Communist Party often sounds very much like some American progressive groups when it warns against the pollution of China's "spiritual civilization" because of mass consumerism.

Both pro- and anti-globalization advocates assume that "Western" cultures are so powerful and attractive that these will erase alternatives. However, if we look beyond surface similarities in clothing, food choices, and entertainment, is there actually much evidence to support the dire warnings of a global monoculture? Just because millions of Chinese citizens now wear jeans, eat

pizza, shop at The Gap, and watch the same sensationalistic Hollywood films as we do, does this mean they are actually becoming "westernized"?

For starters, foreign products succeed in the Chinese market by adapting to local tastes and norms. In other words, they succeed by being both foreign and localized (which is not all that unusual; think of what has happened to Chinese food in foreign countries). Kentucky Fried Chicken serves corn porridge and *youtiao*, Chinese fried breadsticks, along with its chicken, while McDonald's serves teriyaki chicken and rice. These companies also are linked to local partners, use domestic suppliers, and employ almost no Americans.

Besides becoming part of the domestic economic landscape, foreign companies gain market share by adapting their strategies to local cultural realities. "Foreign" fast food restaurants do not simply provide fast food in China. They also serve as domestic tourist attractions, as social spaces for young people, and often as study space for high school and university students. Foreign fast food companies in China have not turned people into hamburger-eating clones of Americans. In fact, as James Watson has pointed out, the success of these companies has occurred during a time when local restaurants and other services have exploded in the country. Today in most urban areas one can find dozens of different types of Chinese cuisine available. In addition, a shadow industry of local fast food brands has grown just as quickly, as companies such as "California Beef Noodle King" and the Hong Kong chain "Cafe de Corral" have thrived.

© Scott C. Squires

A small portion of the shopping district along Nanjing Street in Shanghai (note the KFC at the right).

China's long history of adapting and assimilating to foreign influences must also be taken into account. In addition, much of the foreign influence in the country these days is not actually European and American, but regional. Beijing and Shanghai have just as many Japanese-style sushi shops, Korean barbecue restaurants, and Taiwanese-style teahouses as they do Golden Arches. In music, fashion, movies, and television this is also true: domestic tastes look East as much as West.

In short, "westernization" as short-hand for the disappearance of supposedly traditional Chinese culture is a myth. For more than a century China has been deeply engaged with Europeans and Americans, and its ruling party was founded on the ideals of a nineteenth-century German exile (Karl Marx) and a twentieth-century Russian revolutionary (Vladimir Lenin). The country has also been on a state-directed path of modernization throughout this time. Given this reality, it hardly seems plausible to imagine that Hollywood, hamburgers, and other aspects of our popular culture will transform China into a westernized society. Perhaps most instructive is the case of Japan. Following World War II, it was occupied by the U.S. military and embarked wholeheartedly on a process of mass consumerism. Japan today is one of the most affluent societies in the world, and is filled with visual symbols of "the West." Yet it is difficult to argue Japan is now "Western." Indeed, who influences whom is open to question, since much of the technology changes associated with progress, not to mention the vast majority of the goods we consume in everyday life, come not from "the West," but from places like China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

A typically busy street in Beijing features non-Western shops and restaurants.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of a global monoculture?
2. To what extent has China become "westernized"?

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1. *INSEAD* ("The Business School for the World") website provides an article from 2009 entitled "KFC China's Recipe for Success" by Karen Cho. — http://knowledge.insead.edu/KFCinChina090323.cfm?vid=195
2. The *Center for Media Literacy* website provides an article entitled "China's Challenge: Modernize, not Westernize" by Elizabeth Thoman, CHM. — http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article293.html
3. The *China Today* website provides a special report entitled "Embracing Western Ways While Cleaving to Tradition" by staff writer Lu Rucai. — http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/English/e2005/e200501/p10.htm

Lecture 14

China, Inc.?

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Rob Gifford's *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power*, chapter 23.

zhongguo qiantu – "China's future prospects"

The Chinese encounter with Europe and the United States has been an ongoing theme in Chinese culture, society, economics, and politics since at least the second Opium War (1856–1860). This encounter often has been thought of by Europeans and Americans as either the opening of China to the world, as a mission to bring democracy and Christianity to the unenlightened, or as both. The Chinese perspective has been very different. Whether communist or nationalist, patriot or modernizer, many Chinese have viewed and continue to view "the West" with profound ambiguity, as a source of both potential benefit and harm. In the early twentieth century, this simultaneous attraction and revulsion took shape in a call for *tiyong*, or "essence" and "use": to utilize the practical benefits of technological changes and modern science while maintaining the essence of a distinctly Chinese cultural, moral, and spiritual foundation. This desire for a balance between utility and culture remains a key aspect of policy and social debates within China, among policymakers, citizens, and increasingly, non-governmental organizations. This is a debate that is often ignored by outside critics intent on finding clear answers to complicated questions, such as the extent to which people "resist" their government or possess freedom.

In thinking about this, it is important to consider that outside critiques often emphasize one recent event, the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of May and June 1989, as evidence of looming political change. Focusing solely on 1989 downplays the significant social and economic changes that have followed since then as some outsiders vainly await the next Tiananmen. But what if the demonstrations of 1989 did not mark the start of a mass democracy movement in China but its end point? It is arguable that the starting point of a mass-based democracy movement was not June 4, 1989, but May 4, 1919, the date of the first large-scale student demonstrations in China for democracy. The 1989 demonstrations were thus the end of an era, following closely on the heels of another student-led mass political movement, the Cultural Revolution, an event few people in China would like to see repeated. Indeed, the seven decades between 1919 and 1989 were filled with a continuous series of political campaigns, conflicts, and schisms; what makes the last two decades different is the complete absence of any mass political campaigns. This absence

of politics after three generations of constant politics is for many a benefit, and should not be taken lightly.

But if large-scale mass movements led by an elite class of students are (thankfully) a thing of the past, this does not mean that citizens do not advocate for social change. As we have seen in our discussions about the mass media, consumer safeguards, property ownership, and an emerging language of rights, people do voice complaints, and state officials do at times listen.

Among overseas groups, opposition to the Communist Party is splintered. Evangelical Christian groups, dissidents who fled in 1989, the growing number of Chinese economic migrants in places like the United States, and adherents of spiritual movements such as Falun Gong share little in common. Thus, people who look for a democracy movement emerging from among these groups will be disappointed. Indeed, the only large-scale mass movement in China in the last twenty years that even remotely threatened Communist Party power was Falun Gong. This group has little or nothing to do with democracy or pluralism. It is led by a secretive man who claims supernatural powers, preaches racial "purity," and insists that extraterrestrials live among us—hardly the stuff of tolerance (unless you count toward extraterrestrials).

Some still argue that the growth of private business will encourage democracy. As noted in the introduction to this course, the assumption that private entrepreneurs will become a class demanding democratic institutions is highly questionable. It appears that in China quite the opposite has occurred: businesspeople succeed by cultivating ties with state institutions, agencies, and elites, not by contesting these. More practically, while investors and business leaders have an interest in a strong commercial law system, they have less interest in advocating for greater oversight of labor conditions, or for that matter a strong worker rights framework.

Photo courtesy of Robert J. Shepherd

A shop near Mandala Square in the Tibetan quarter of Zhongdian, Yunnan Province.

Another assumption is that China's emerging middle and upper classes will demand democracy. Yet given that many in these classes have benefitted from the current system, why would they demand wholesale democratization? A widespread urban antipathy toward the numerically large class of peasants also remains part of everyday life. Chairman Mao (himself from the countryside, albeit the son of a relatively comfortable landowner), tried to destroy this class contempt by sending educated urbanites to the countryside. Mao is long dead, but the urban-rural divide remains.

This is not to say that Chinese are incapable of democracy (Taiwan has shown this is false); rather, can a country of 1.3 billion people function democratically? In this case, China can only be compared to India, not to the United States or European Union member states. India might be democratic, but has its system actually delivered a better life to citizens?

As Guobin Yang has noted, there might not be a national democracy movement in China, but there is a lively activist movement entailing multiple interest groups with different agendas and causes, including environmental, religious, labor, HIV and AIDS support, women's rights, educational issues, taxes, land use, and "lifestyle" movements. Most of these groups do not focus on radical change or revolution but on pragmatic goals; they are not disruptive, and often seek to raise consciousness by lobbying both state actors and the public.

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A young girl and others celebrate National Day on October 1, 2008, in Beijing.

However, the fact that many Chinese citizens have more control over their own lives does not necessarily mean they become cosmopolitan and tolerant. For example, growing neo-nationalist sentiment is not simply a product of state propaganda. Instead, it is often the relatively privileged youth, with access to education, urban residency, and decent job prospects, who are the most nationalistic. You are more likely to meet university students criticizing American or European support for the Dalai Lama or news outlets such as CNN for "anti Chinese" stories than you are students talking about democracy. It is naïve to think Chinese critics of their own government are necessarily interested in democracy and self-determination.

And of course significant challenges remain. Economic gains have not benefitted people equally, and society is increasingly fractured along class lines. As the

middle class grows, a poor class of peasants and the less educated has become locked into a cycle of material deprivation and a lack of agency. The Taiwan issue looms large, ethnic unrest continues in Xinjiang and Tibet, and the quality of life is increasingly debated. The real unemployment rate is 12 to 14 percent and there is little actual oversight of financial markets or consumer products. As a historian once remarked to me, "The question should not just be whether China is the next Japan. It should be whether China is the next Brazil—always almost becoming developed, but never quite making it."

A pessimistic view would see little hope for significant political change or the emergence of a vibrant civic sphere, given the Leninist basis of the Communist Party and its focus on maintaining complete power. Without external checks, there are no means of curbing power abuses and corruption. China today might well be a mirror image of Indonesia in the 1980s: a soft authoritarian state that remained stable as long as economic growth continued, but quickly collapsed in 1998 during the Asian financial crisis.

An optimistic view would note the beginnings of a civil society and a property-owning class, increased personal freedoms, and the fact that on social issues the Party does pay attention to citizen concerns. In recent years, there have been successful online campaigns against corporate illegalities and local corruption cases, as well as increased debate within the Party about future directions. In addition, current President Hu Jintao has publicly declared himself on the side of social welfare. An optimistic view looks at Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, Taiwan's Nationalist Party, or Singapore's People's Action Party as models for a future Communist Party. All three function as "big tent" parties, where reform comes from within the party ranks.

Finally, a pragmatic view must acknowledge the serious short- and long-term problems facing China: environmental and energy problems, population control side-effects, a widening wealth gap, widespread corruption, and a relatively weak central government. Yet the CCP appears to be generally credited for significant reforms that have helped many. As long as these reforms continue to benefit some and offer hope to others, there is little reason to assume any significant political change will occur.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Did Tiananmen Square mark the start of a mass democracy movement, or the end of one?
2. Would democracy deliver a better life for Chinese citizens?

Suggested Reading

Gifford, Rob. *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power*. Reprint. New York: Random House, 2008.

Other Books of Interest

Buruma, Ian. *Bad Elements: Chinese Rebels from Los Angeles to Beijing*. New York: Random House, 2001.

Jacques, Martin. *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Ross, Robert S., and Zhu Feng, eds. *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008.

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Navarro, Peter. *Waking Dragon: The Emerging Chinese Economy and Its Impact on the World*. Modern Scholar series. Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books, LLC, 2007.

Websites of Interest

1. National Public Radio's website provides the text of an interview from its *All Things Considered* program between Guy Raz and author Martin Jacques from November 2009 entitled "What the Future Holds When China Rules," and includes an excerpt from Jacques's book *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*. — http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120416955
2. The *ABC News* website provides a report entitled "China's Premier Wen Lays Out Future" on Premier Wen Jiabao's policy plans from a two-hour "State of the Union-style" speech at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 5, 2010. — http://abcnews.go.com/Business/International/chinas-premier-wen-lays-bright-future/story?id=10017714

COURSE MATERIALS

Suggested Readings:

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Deppman, Hsiu-chuang. *Adapted for the Screen: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Fiction and Film*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010.

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Ross, Robert S., and Zhu Feng, eds. *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008.

Shapiro, Judith. *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Zheng, Yongnian. *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State, and Society in China*. Stanford University Press, 2007.

These books are available online through www.modernscholar.com or by calling Recorded Books at 1-800-636-3399.

RECOMMENDED FILMS

Shower (*Xizao*). Directed by Zhang Yang. Distributed by Sony Pictures Classic, 1999.

When the eldest son returns to his family in Beijing to help care for his mentally handicapped younger brother, he is forced to face up to the reality that the life he remembers in China is being slowly wiped away from memory by the machinations of modernity. A bittersweet comedy by Zhang Yang, this film won Best Film and Best Director at the Seattle Film Festival.

The World (*Shi Jie*). Directed by Jia Zhangke. Distributed by Zeitgeist Films, 2001.

Acclaimed Chinese writer-director Jia Zhangke casts a compassionate eye on the daily loves, friendships, and desperate dreams of the twenty-somethings from China's remote provinces who come to live and work at Beijing's World Park. A bizarre cross-cultural pollination of Las Vegas and Epcot Center, World Park features lavish shows presented amid scaled-down replicas of the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, St. Mark's Square, the Pyramids, and even the Twin Towers.

Big Shot's Funeral (*Da Wan*). Directed by Feng Xiaogang. Distributed by Columbia Tristar, 2002.

In *Big Shot's Funeral*, an American film director named Tyler (played by Donald Sutherland) in Beijing finds failing health. The director's assistant hires a man named Yoyo to film a documentary about him. The director discovers he is no longer going to film a large-budget film. He and Yoyo decide that he should have a "comedy funeral." Soon afterward the American director falls ill and Yoyo begins planning the funeral.

Curiosity Kills the Cat (*Hao qixin hai si mao*). Directed by Zhang Yibai. Distributed by Golden Network, 2006.

A strange story of adultery, jealousy, voyeurism, and revenge is told in chapters by three of the characters involved in this ambitious drama from director Zhang Yibai. Momo (Lin Yuan) is a photographer who has a less-than-healthy obsession with the lives of other people, especially the folks who live in the apartment complex near her studio.

Lost in Beijing (*Pingguo*). Directed by Li Yu. Distributed by New Yorker Films, 2007.

Shuangxi leaves his hometown for Beijing and soon finds work in a photo studio, hoping that one day he will be able to exhibit his own work. He lives with his girlfriend, Xiao Qian, in a rented courtyard, and apart from the humiliation of having his temporary residence permit constantly scrutinized by the police, life is good for Shuangxi, whose first joint exhibition

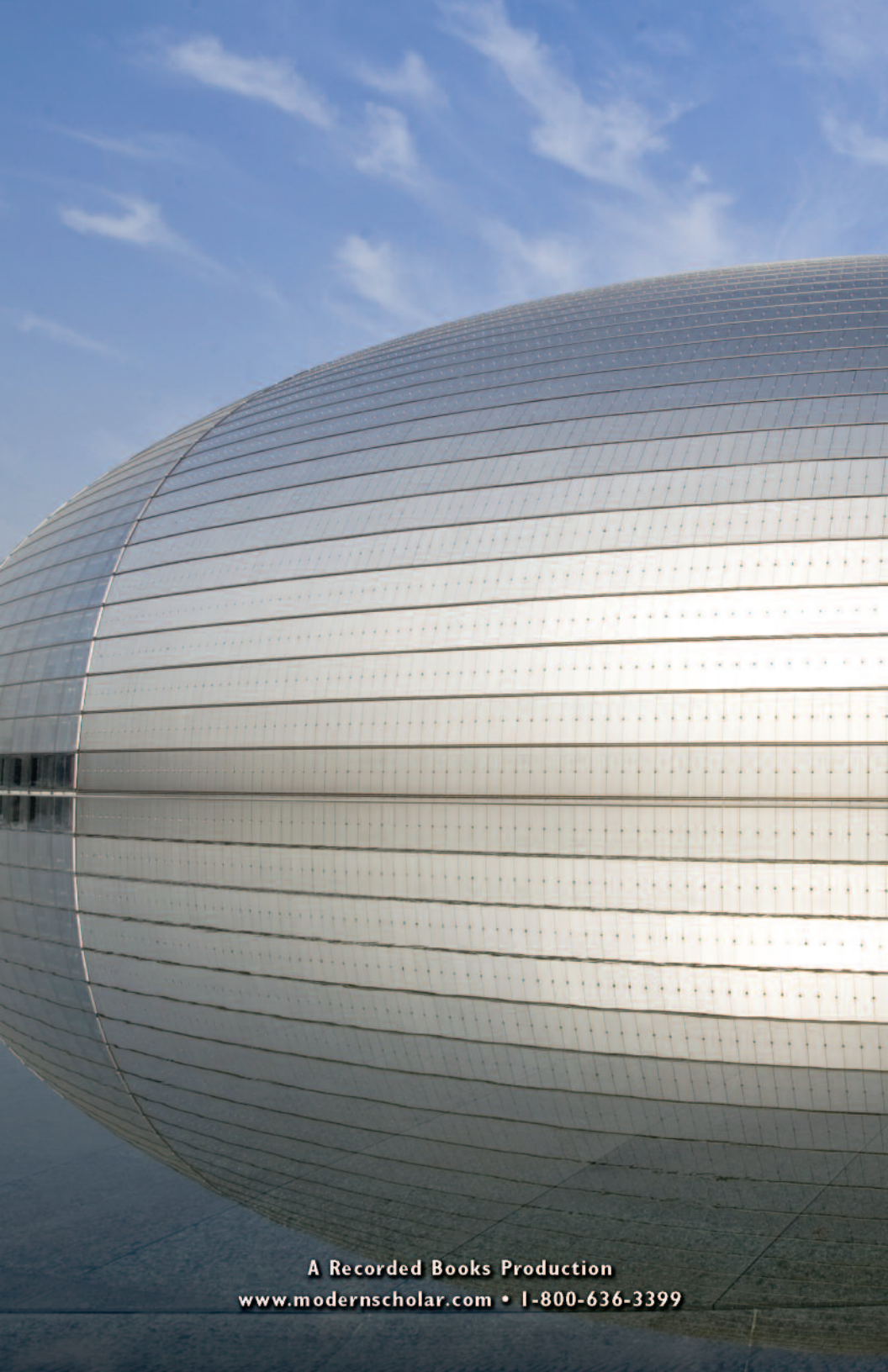
wins praise from critics. However, events soon take a tragic turn when a gas leak asphyxiates his girlfriend and leaves Shuangxi with both physical and psychological injuries. With the persuasion of his family, he reluctantly returns to his hometown, restarting the life that he had been so eager to leave behind.

Eat, Drink, Man, Woman (*Yin Shi Nan Nu*). Directed by Ang Lee. Distributed by MGM World Films, 1994.

Trouble is cooking for widower and master chef Chu (Sihung Lung), who's about to discover that no matter how dazzling and delicious his culinary creations might be, they're no match for the libidinous whims of his three beautiful but rebellious daughters.

Unknown Pleasures (*Xiao Wu*). Directed by Jia Zhangke. Distributed by New Yorker Films, 1999.

Unknown Pleasures follows two nineteen-year-olds, Bin Bin and Xiao, as they wander the streets and hang out in pool halls, dance clubs, and karaoke bars looking for excitement. Sparks fly when Xiao Ji meets a beautiful dancer, and Bin Bin pursues romance with a young student. Taking a cue from American crime movies, the temptation of easy money becomes too alluring and in a final attempt to break free, Xiao Ji and Bin Bin embark on a half-baked plan to rob a bank.



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